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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Reimagining Transatlantic Iberian Conquests in Postcolonial Narratives and Rewriting  
Spaces of Resistance

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Spanish

by

Seher Rabia Rowther

March 2020

Dissertation Committee:  
Dr. Benjamin Liu, Chairperson  
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Dr. Freya Schiwy

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2020

The Dissertation of Seher Rabia Rowther is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

## DEDICATION

The best stories unite us despite our various disparities and experiences in life. The worst event I experienced in graduate school was the hospitalization of my mother and my grandmother in the winter of 2016. It was the most challenging period in my life because my parents have given me a beautiful life of love, laughter, protection, and guidance. My family has been the best living example of strength and compassion.

The summer after my grandmother passed, I went to Spain for the first time in my life. While traveling through Spain, I saw her in a dream. She was smiling as she passed me by—the same way she used to walk through our house with her walker. When I left Spain to return home, I started reading Radwa Ashour's trilogy on the plane. When Radwa wrote about the families of Granada historically removed from their homes and forced to trek across the kingdoms of Castile, she did not just describe the multitude and their possessions in tow. She wrote about a grandson carrying his grandmother until her last breath and then having to bury her in a place he did not even recognize. I was crying when I read those words. I have personally connected with every story I discuss here.

My work is imperfect, but any merit within it, I would like to dedicate to my family—especially to my parents, Mohammed Najieb Khan Rowther and Shamim Fatima Rowther, and my siblings, Naseem, Nadia and Armaan. Lastly, this is dedicated to my husband, Farooq Mohammed. I love you all. Thank you for your support and patience.

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Reimagining Transatlantic Iberian Conquests in Postcolonial Narratives and Rewriting  
Spaces of Resistance

by

Seher Rabia Rowther

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Spanish  
University of California, Riverside, March 2020  
Dr. Benjamin Liu, Chairperson

This dissertation analyzes the medieval and colonial imagery in three works which evoke a history of epistemic violence and erasures against indigenous, contemporaneous identities, communities, and traditions of knowledge in Al-Andalus and Latin America after 1492. Darren Aronofsky's film, *The Fountain*, Radwa Ashour's trilogy of *Granada*, and Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account*, all show how fiction and film can both reinforce and subvert the mythology of conquest in the representation of transatlantic, sixteenth-century Iberian empire. Fiction offers a space of resistance to remember the voices of the subaltern, to deconstruct the silences of these histories, and to reflect on the perspectives and experiences of the colonized, occupied and displaced Others of colonial enterprise. Fiction can challenge the Orientalist tropes and imperial gaze which still color the contemporary imagination towards Amerindians, Muslims and Arabs. Reimagining the past speaks to the present, and redraws the blurred lines of historiography and storytelling.

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## Introduction

The goal of the project is not to relay a series of comparisons between fact and fiction. This analysis is a case study into the dynamic ways popular culture's image of the history of conquest has been formed, reformed, and challenged through fiction. In *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization*, Walter D. Mignolo provides case examples of epistemic violence against indigenous conceptions of time, space and memory of the individuals and communities "discovered" in the post-1492 period of imperial expansion. Contemporary works of cultural production carry a legacy of our imagination of this past. Domination and control of one culture over another shaped a malleable image of these colonial encounters. Aronofsky's film, *The Fountain*, must be viewed under the scrutiny of *colonial semiotics*, the study of power and domination by imposed systems of knowledge and being, collective memories and conceptions of space. *Colonial semiotics* dissects the system of knowledge, which supported the policy of labor exploitation, resource extraction, and epistemic erasures of *coloniality* shrouded in a discourse of modernity.

Language is power and to write is to possess. Colonial chroniclers of the Iberian conquest imposed an act of possession over the peoples and landscapes they interpreted and wrote about to send their accounts back to a royal audience across the Atlantic. However, as Mignolo points out, these accounts came from a specific *locus of observation (perspective)* with a corresponding *locus of enunciation (manuscripts, maps)* as the visual and narrative texts produced were seen as faithful, transparent, objective

accounts. Imperial knowledge ultimately served to *create* an imperial reality. Chroniclers with incomplete information screened the systems of knowledge, the spaces, sights and sounds, and the people they encountered through their cultural frameworks to make those bodies legible to an imperial enterprise.

Postcolonial readings of each work are informed by the work of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, to include Spain's unique colonial history as it contrasts the British and French imperial enterprises. The analysis of how each work reinforces or challenges the representation of non-European, non-Christian, non-White Other is informed by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, as the film recreates the binary imagery of Orient versus Occident, European Self versus non-European Other. Said acknowledges the uniqueness of Spain and its relationship with Islam and Muslims on separate occasions.<sup>1</sup> Still, *Orientalism* is a work that focuses on the "particular closeness" of Britain and France with the Orient.<sup>2</sup> Spain and Latin America are not in the scope of Said's work, but his framework informs this project. The non-European, non-Christian, non-White Other exists as a creation within "an accepted grid for filtering [...] Western consciousness" where the Western Self is constantly in a central, superior position in comparison to his non-Western counterpart.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter 1 provides the framework to show how fiction can reinforce the tropes of colonial erasures. The first chapter is a resistant reading of Darren Aronofsky's film, *The*

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<sup>1</sup> Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. 1978. Vintage Books, 2003. on Pp. 1, 17, 59, 74, 82, 93, 304, 315. The *Orient* and *Occident*, "east" and "west," was perceived, described, and reinforced by British and French colonialism, which superseded Spanish colonial dominance amongst European empires.

<sup>2</sup> (Said 4)

<sup>3</sup> Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. 1978. Vintage Books, 2003. Print. Pp. 6-8.

*Fountain* (2006), and the mythology of conquest within contemporary imagination. The imagery reinforces and romanticizes images of conquest and erasures upon bodies of indigenous spaces, knowledge, and communities. While the story evokes a deep pathos in the meditation on mortality, love, and loss, the imagery communicates a conception of the Western Self mirrored, opposed, and transformed through the Eastern, Silenced Other. The romanticization of conquest and the recasting of places, figures, and events of the sixteenth-century transatlantic Iberian empire diverge immensely from the history yet still perpetuates the tropes of *Orientalism*.

The fantastical reimagining of conquered spaces of Latin America and Al-Andalus and the representation of Mayan and Moorish Others of colonial Spain positions them to serve as catalysts of the transformation of the protagonists. The film reinforces the tropes of *Orientalism* as the frame adopts an imperial gaze upon silenced, possessed bodies—human bodies, bodies of land, bodies of knowledge, and celestial bodies. In the film, images of cultural productions from separate systems of knowledge and the way they interact echoes the erasures imposed upon the masses of Amerindian peoples and cultures to facilitate imperial possession and control. The entire film stems from the imaginations of the characters. The protagonist, Tommy (Hugh Jackman), is struggling to cope with the terminal illness of his wife, Izzi (Rachel Weisz). He uses his research study to try and find a cure to save her, but Izzi knows her time is more limited than Tommy has realized. She is a writer who uses her fiction to help her husband learn to accept her death. She reimagines him as her *conquistador*, her conqueror, and her manuscript,

entitled *The Fountain*, forms the foundational framework for reimagining Tommy as an epic, heroic figure in an imaginary past, to help him cope with the reality of death.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4, look at how fiction creates spaces of resistance and remembrance out of the traces of the historically silenced and marginalized communities as creators of their histories and narratives. I counterpose the imagination of the historical past in Izzi's writing with the work of two other female writers. Radwa Ashour and Laila Lalami utilize fiction to write against epistemic erasures. Ashour emphasized how the borders between history and fiction are permeable, always ready to be erased and redrawn. However, Ashour did not accept the designation of the "historical novel" because she viewed all novels linked to history.<sup>4</sup> Her trilogy analyzed for this project was initially published in Arabic (*Thulaythiyya Gharnata*, 1994-1995), but I will be using the English and Spanish translations of her work. The first novel of the trilogy, *Gharnata* (*Granada: a novel* in English, 2003), was translated into English, and the entire trilogy was translated into Spanish (*Granada: Trilogía*, 2008).

Ashour shows the experience of multiple generations of a Muslim, Arab family living in Granada, starting with the siege and defeat of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada in the winter of 1491 until the final expulsion of the Moriscos (the Muslims of sixteenth-century Spain who had converted to Christianity) in 1609. The reader sees the entire history after the fall of Granada from the intimate perspective of one family as they feel the increasing pressure of occupation, forced conversion, and forced assimilation by the Castilian government and the pervasive reach of the Inquisition. Laura Hutcheon's term

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<sup>4</sup> "Historical Novels... The Relationship Between Art and Reality." *Nasher News*, 22 Mar. 2018, [nasher-news.com/historical-novels-the-relationship-between-art-and-reality/](http://nasher-news.com/historical-novels-the-relationship-between-art-and-reality/). Web.

*historiographic metafiction* describes fiction that critically engages historiography to underline the overlapping and intersecting natures of history and fiction.<sup>5</sup> Ashour and Lalami fully exercise the malleable potential of fiction in order to anchor the subjective experiences of space, time, and history from the perspective of the family of Abu Jaafar.

In Chapter 2, I will focus on how Ashour reframes the epistemic framework through the characters' engagement with the space of Granada in both constructed and natural environments. Ashour uses the perspective of children to deconstruct the spectacle of possession and imperial display as the grandchildren of Abu Jaafar, Saleema and Hasan, and the adopted apprentices he took in, Saad and Naeem observe the procession of Christopher Columbus on his way to Barcelona to meet with the Catholic monarchs after his first return from the Caribbean. Ashour also counters this narrative of possession through her presentation of how her characters interact with nature. Space and nature are both an integral presence in the narration of this human experience of history.

Among all of her characters, Saleema bint Jaafar is the most powerful representation of the family's link to their identities in written knowledge, and the Islamic epistemic framework of the family which constantly views nature and nonhuman animals, plants, even stones as witnesses, allies, and sources of inspiration which can embody and mirror their emotional and intellectual conditions. Nature is a source of inspiration to Saleema, who inherits her love of books from her grandfather. Saleem's story continually echoes the image of the gazelle. This animal inspires her in her life, her marriage and the image of the gazelle is also linked to her death when she is burned alive

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<sup>5</sup>Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge 2002. Print.

by the Spanish Inquisition for possessing Arabic manuscripts after they have been made illegal. The image of the gazelle is linked to Saleema's role as a scholar and healer above all else. She is a clandestine autodidact who smuggles Arabic manuscripts to protect her cultural inheritance from the Inquisition. The first book of Ashour's trilogy ends with the death of Saleema. Granada—the the home to the family of Abu Jaafar as it was, dies with Saleema, and there is no possibility for a real return except in memory and imagination.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the second and third novels of the trilogy. The second novel is named for Saleema's sister-in-law, Maryama. While the first book focuses on the destruction and preservation of written knowledge, the second book focuses on oral culture embodied in Maryama and Naeem, and transmitted to Ali. Oral culture and written culture intertwine within the trilogy, and this link manifests in the bond between Maryama and Saleema, which Ashour reminds the reader of after Saleema's death. But Maryama represents the oral transmission of culture amidst the increasing fragmentation of the family unit. The ongoing struggle to preserve the family's cultural identity is represented in the object of the *sunduqor* marriage chest, which Maryama had brought with her after marrying into the family.

While the first novel represented the experience of occupation, the second and third novels focus on the human experience of diaspora and displacement. Ashour intensifies the linkages between the two spaces of the transatlantic Iberian empire when Naeem returns to Granada after living with a missionary in colonial New Spain. He forms a bond with Maryama's grandson, Ali, but at the end of the second book, Ali is left alone,

without a home, and all of the elder members of his family have passed or moved away. The third and final part of the trilogy is titled *Al-Rahil*, or “The Departure” in English (*La Partidain* Spanish). The final years of the Moriscos are depicted in the journey and experiences of Ali. He is the last descendant of Abu Jaafar in the trilogy, and he is the protagonist we follow in the last book. In his story, the reader sees the end of this arch in the trilogy, which showed a family hanging on by threads to their home, their language, their religion, and their familial unity. With Ali, the complete unraveling of these threads is represented in the fact that he is only left with stories and memories of his family and his home.

Amidst this deep exploration of defeat, Ashour performs in her fiction, the ending of the story of the family of Abu Jaafar becomes one last gesture of subversion when Ali does not depart from the peninsula. Seeing the ships of Moriscos leaving the shores under the Edict of Expulsion, which *theoretically* removed all traces of the descendants of Al-Andalus from Spain, Ali turns back. The novel ends on this final note of ambiguity to remind the readers that this historical narrative, which made the Other of imperial Spain disappear is just a story, which can mix truth and fiction just like the novel itself.

Fiction creates spaces of subversion within the colonial and medieval imagination as it reframes Eurocentric historiography through storytelling. The act of writing itself is a reclaimed, reimagined agency as language is the site of the historical violence of erasure, and the reimagining of the time and space co-inhabited by communities, families, and individuals re-orient meanings assigned to space, text, bodies, and land to counteract the embedded narratives of *colonial semiotics*. In the works explored, the

artists problematize the representation of imperial Iberia's Others as they were idealized and demonized as Noble Savage and Monstrous Heathen. The fictionalized repossession of historically marginalized narratives serves to bring attention to the constructed nature of imperial conquest as an epistemological enterprise, executed through language and imagery which shapes and influences the policy and actions of the colonial power. As Edward Said demonstrated, Orientalist knowledge created an internal logic for empires, academic organizations, and individuals operating within the imperial centers.

The final chapter will discuss Laila Lalami's novel, *The Moor's Account* (2014), which gives a fictional voice to recuperate the historical figure of Estebanico and emphasizes the epistemic violence of *erasures* against multiple kinds of bodies—individual bodies, communal bodies, bodies of land, and metaphorical bodies of knowledge and culture. Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account* presents us with the recuperation of identity and agency through the act of writing. Lalami rewrites the colonial past through the consciousness of the subaltern. The novel presents a self-narrated account of Estebanico, the Black Arab slave who was company and witness to the trials and failures of the expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez through modern-day Florida, Texas, and Mexico. The historical Estebanico is given a voice in through the fictional Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam Al-Zamori. Reclaiming his name and his history within his account is the first act of decolonizing his own story.

The novel is a historiographic metafiction which reflects on the multivalent nature of storytelling in both oral and written form, and stories are reframed within a critical lens by the main character as he names his *rival* storyteller, Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca who



wrote the *Relación*, also called *Naufragios* (1542). Mustafa gives a retrospective account, which starts with the arrival of the expedition to The Land of the Indians and then retraces his route from across the Atlantic Ocean. Mustafa describes his family and his life in Azemmur as a free man, his fall into slavery, and his conversion in Seville. Mustafa's renaming gesture is a link in the broader theme of violence through language.

The narrative imagination of Lalami derives from the absences and omissions in the historical narrative of conquest rather than reproducing those absences. Lalami writes Mustafa out of the traces of Estebanico. Rather than drawing the same tropes of Orientalism imposed upon multiple bodies (land, people, language, knowledge), Lalami writes a narrator-protagonist who problematizes the neat delineations of Self/Other binary conceptions to collapse these categories altogether and to remind readers of the human agendas which weave discourses according to individual desires and personal interest. The capacity of fiction to decolonize imagination manifests in reimagining perspectives which undermine the logic of coloniality, to defamiliarize conquest as it is experienced by the colonized. Representation of internal space is a means to problematize the external erasures. Readers gain a critical distance from tropes of the Orientalist, colonial imagination. The distance brings into view the malleability and fictional nature of the recycled discourses of colonial semiotics, the unstable binary between colonizer and colonized, the artificial conception of East and West.

The epistemic violence of the historical past is first recognized and then problematized within fiction. Fiction serves as a creative act of remembrance and resistance to those epistemic erasures. The representations of violence and erasures of

conquest after 1492 speak to the reality of the present, especially in the representations of Muslims. The novels speak to the current political climate in the United States because people need to be able to step into perspectives of difference—a religious Other, ethnic Other, racial Other. Fiction offers a productive space to remember and reimagine what *might have been*. Lastly, it is a means to decolonize the imagination. Remembering the aftermath of 1492 and the manipulation, omission, and bias in language and imagery used to represent the past speaks to perceptions of marginalized communities in the present. Reframing the past speaks to the need to reflect on our present.

## Chapter 1: Mythology of Conquest in Darren Aronofsky's *The Fountain*

The representation of sixteenth-century transatlantic imperial Spain and Latin America in Darren Aronofsky's *The Fountain* (2006) is an example of how representations of medieval and colonial conquests can perpetuate tropes of *Orientalism* and epistemic erasures upon colonized bodies of knowledge, land, and peoples. The film incorporates images derived from the conquests of Al-Andalus and Latin America (the Yucatán). The representation of knowledge and cultural production in the film is fundamental. Walter D. Mignolo's work, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, describes the cultural history of epistemic violence against indigenous systems of knowledge in the conquest of the Latin America after 1492. Aronofsky's film should be read contrapuntally through the framework of *colonial semiotics* to analyze the film's representations or lack thereof of the historical coexistence and conflict of different cultural traditions and cultural productions in colonial situations as these interactions which were characterized by power and domination (7-9).

*Colonial semiotics* looks at how relationships of power between colonizing and colonized peoples produced parallel interactions between different systems of language, knowledge, and cultural memory. The mapping and naming territories colonized represents the domination of one epistemic framework over another, imposing one conception of space and resulting in the silencing of contemporaneous cultural

frameworks of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Imperial expeditions marked the continents with epistemic erasures through the process of renaming and misnaming. Many territories were renamed to recall the lands across the sea because the conquerors traversed the “new world” while granting the “new” places the namesakes of sites and cities of the “old world.” The land which approximately makes up present-day Mexico was named “New Spain.” There was also a “New Galicia” and a “New Granada.” The film reaffirms this erasure in the naming of *New Spain*.

Understanding the process of colonial erasures requires identifying what Mignolo calls a *locus of enunciation*: knowledge created through a cultural, epistemic framework that was specific to a time, place, and people and then imposed upon conquered communities. Mignolo’s work helps outline an epistemic enterprise after 1492, which made European knowledge systems universal while Amerindian indigenous traditions of knowledge were contained, destroyed, lost, or mistranslated under imperial authority. Within the colonization of Latin America, a specific perspective (locus of *observation*), most often derived from traditions of late Renaissance Iberian and Italian thought, became an interpretive authority of all knowledge of the so-called New World.<sup>7</sup>

The creation of knowledge through the framework of colonial possession led to the negation and destruction of indigenous representations of space, time, and history.

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<sup>6</sup>Mignolo, Walter D. “Colonial Situations, Geographical Discourses and Territorial Representations: Toward A Diatopical Understanding of Colonial Semiosis.” *Dispositio*, vol. 14, no. 36/38, 1989, pp. 93–140. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/41491356](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41491356). Accessed 4 Feb. 2020. Web.

<sup>7</sup>*Colonial semiotics* represents the system of logic represented in signs and relations which supported labor exploitation, resource extraction and epistemic erasures of *coloniality* which were shrouded in a manufactured discourse and teleology of *modernity*.

The logic of coloniality was created and supported through discourse in language, images, and policy.<sup>8</sup> Mignolo compartmentalizes an entire enterprise of epistemic erasures built for domination and control over the peoples, lands, and languages of difference, where “China, Islam, and the New World were all evaluated (in their organization and transmission of knowledge) with the yardstick of Renaissance discursive genres and their implicit epistemology” (169). The “alternative” conceptions of time, space, and history which did not fit the mold of the Christian, late Renaissance, European models at hand were either suppressed or ignored. He writes about how cultural differences, especially those differences which pertained to the transmission of knowledge, were converted into values and placed within a hierarchy. Entire worldviews and conceptions of time, space, history, which contained the collective memories of entire peoples, were deemed inferior to the late Renaissance system of letters, religion, and geography, which was imported and imposed upon systems of knowledge of colonized communities.

This film has a fascinating production history because, despite multiple obstacles, Aronofsky finished putting the story on the screen after the first attempt at making the original film shut down after three years of production.<sup>9</sup> Aronofsky was incredibly intent on telling this story. The medium of the graphic novel provided him the best means to do that until he could relaunch the film. He returned to his roots in small budget filmmaking, and the storytelling of Aronofsky’s project serves as a fascinating example

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<sup>8</sup>Mignolo, Walter D. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality & Colonization*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014.

<sup>9</sup>Macnab, Geoffrey. “I Knew We Were Going to Get Attacked ...’.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 7 Sept. 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/sep/07/festivals1>. Web.

to explore the overlapping nature of comics and film. So, the film and the graphic novel were two narrative projects created in conversation with each other, stemming from the same imagination. The film features cinematography by Matthew Libatique, and the graphic novel features art by Ken Williams. Both transform and transplant the colonial and medieval imaginary so that the images do not directly correlate with the official history. Rather than doing a cross-analysis of the graphic novel and the film, this chapter will focus on the film while the graphic novel remains a valuable insight into the original story that the director wanted to create on-screen.

The film never explicitly cites the year and dates of the three intersecting timelines which represent past, present, and future. Past, present, and future all coincide within the film. The audience never receives a precise chronology on-screen. The trailer of the film gives three specific calendar years: *Conquistador* Tomas and Queen Isabel (1500 AD); The Neuroscientist, Dr. Tommy Creo, and his wife, Izzi Creo (2000 AD); and The Space Traveler Tom and the Treeship (2500 AD).<sup>10</sup> Within the graphic novel, the reader sees a year assigned for each temporality as well: Captain Tomas Verde and Queen Isabel (Winter 1535); The Space Traveler and the Treeship (Winter 2463); and, The Neuroscientist, Dr. Tommy Creo and his wife, Izzi Creo (Winter 1997). It is important to remember that the viewer of the film might not have access to either the temporality of the trailer or the graphic novel. This reading on the temporal structure based on the information presented on-screen.

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<sup>10</sup>“The Fountain (2006) Official Trailer - Hugh Jackman Movie.” *YouTube*, Movieclips Classic Trailers, 5 July 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8IlyFCbNZg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8IlyFCbNZg). Web.

## **Past, Present and Future: Tomas, Tommy, and Tom**

*The Fountain* tells the story of Tommy (Hugh Jackman), a doctor and medical researcher, who is obsessed with his work as he steers his research team's focus away from Alzheimer's and aging to work towards curing cancerous tumors. His medical research team uses chimpanzees, whom they operate on and observe. Tommy decides to test an ethnobotanical compound from a tree in Guatemala on Donovan, a chimpanzee research subject. Tommy's extremely reckless disregard of research protocol after using an untested compound on Donovan results in his supervisor reprimanding him. His supervisor, Lillian (Ellen Burstyn), tells Tommy to go home and spend time with his wife, Izzi (Rachel Weisz), who is terminally ill with a brain tumor.

Izzi (short for Isabel) is the reason Tommy is obsessed with his cancer research. When Tommy returns home to Izzi on Lillian's command, he finds Izzi stargazing through a telescope upon a nebula (an interstellar cloud of dust and gas) creating a golden hue around a dying star.<sup>11</sup> She is a writer who is researching Mayan cosmology for her manuscript in progress, and the dying star Izzi shows Tommy through the telescope is Xibalba. Izzi tells Tommy it is the place where the souls of the dead go to be reborn.

According to Izzi, her book starts in Spain and ends in Xibalba. Izzi draws inspiration from the idea of a dying star that will give life to millions of other stars, and this idea is important to Izzi's struggle for acceptance of her mortality. Tommy is still in denial because, even while he is searching for cures in his laboratory, his wife's condition

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<sup>11</sup>"Nebula." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nebula](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nebula). Web.

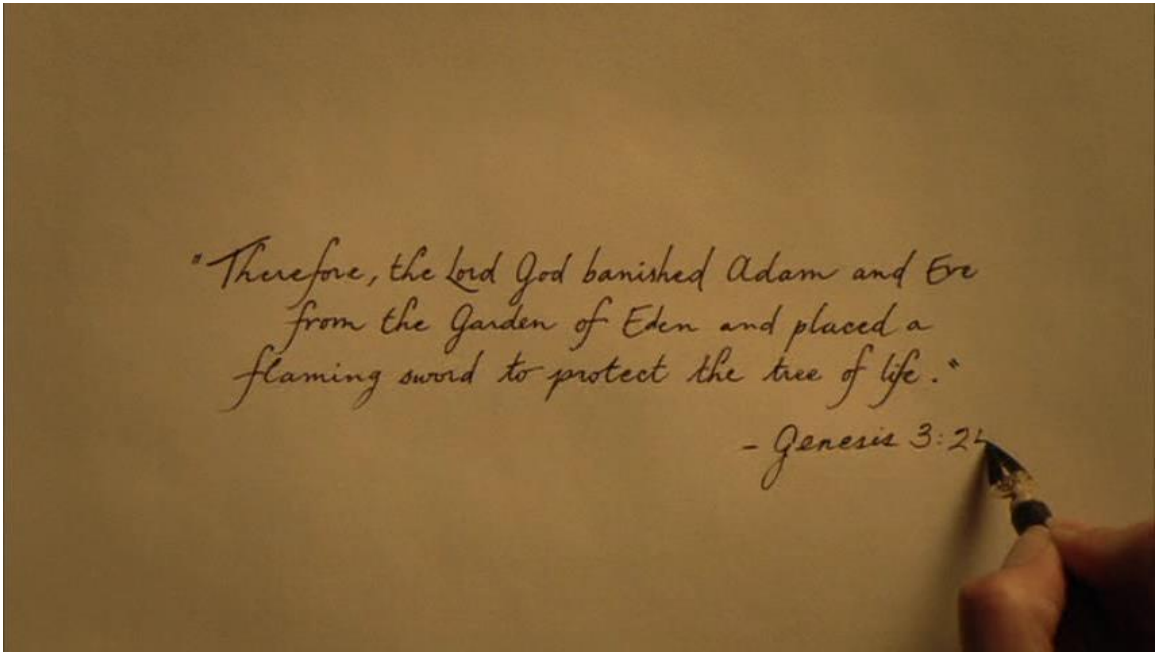
is out of his control. His denial turns to anger when he returns to the laboratory and discovers that the surgery on Donovan with the Guatemalan ethnobotanical compound has yielded no results in the size or growth of the tumor. Disillusioned and depressed, Tommy returns home to Izzi. He crawls into bed next to his wife but is unable to sleep and goes to another room where he breaks down in tears. There he sees Izzi's manuscript and opens it for the first time. Aronofsky's film and Izzi's manuscript are both entitled *The Fountain*. The film does not begin with Tommy and Izzi though they are the center of the film.

The film begins by showing the writing of Izzi's epigraph for her manuscript and then planting the viewer within the manuscript. The manuscript is the main source of visual tropes of colonial imagery, with transplanted images from Spain's transatlantic imperial history and the Spanish Inquisition. Izzi appears as Queen Isabel, and Tommy is a *conquistador*, a sixteenth-century Spanish conqueror named Tomas.<sup>12</sup> Izzi's handwriting begins the entire film. Hugh Jackman and Rachel Weisz portray their reimagined forms in the manuscript as Izzi and Tommy both project themselves into the fiction of Izzi's manuscript. After seeing the verse from Genesis, the film submerges the viewer within the manuscript without explaining or distinguishing between fiction and reality.

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<sup>12</sup>I am using the English spelling from the graphic novel, as it is virtually a director's cut of the original screenplay for the film. I am also opting out of the Spanish spelling "Tomás" in order to be consistent with other research articles on the film. To discriminate between the three timelines, I am using the same naming system Jadranka Skorin-Kapov uses: Tomas (past), Tommy (present), and Tom (future).





**Figure 1** Izzi's handwriting in the first shot of the film (*The Fountain*, 2006)

In the first shot, there is total darkness until the light shines on a page, and the viewer sees the hand of Izzi writing an epigraph from the Book of Genesis (Figure 1).

The frame of a written page fades into a vision of the same nebula described later in the film (Xibalba) and then fades to an image of a monstrance within a makeshift altar.<sup>13</sup>

Within the monstrance is a lock of brown hair, and from the monstrance, the camera pans out to show a man unnamed at the beginning of the film (Hugh Jackman) kneeling before the altar in a jungle at night. He is Izzi's protagonist—Captain Tomas, a *conquistador*. At the altar, he smells a pouch which contains a golden ring. The scent ushers a flashback of the face of his queen (Rachel Weisz), giving him the same ring. He says to himself, "Let

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<sup>13</sup> In Roman Catholic Christianity, "A receptacle where the host is held." *The American Heritage Dictionary*. Houghton Mifflin, 2001. Pg. 549.

us finish it” and crosses himself before the viewer sees the cover of Izzi’s manuscript and the title of the film, *The Fountain*.



**Figure 2** The *conquistador* remembers the face of his Queen (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The *conquistador* and his two comrades approach a pyramid in the middle of a dark jungle, and once they enter a tunnel-like pathway with skulls and bones lining each side, they march towards the foot of the pyramid. Suddenly, a wooden gate closes the path behind them, and they realize they have entered a trap. The two comrades retreat and are killed with spears, but the central figure, Captain Tomas, continues to fight his way through a mass of warriors. The warriors overpower him and then carry him to the foot of the pyramid, gesturing for him to ascend the stairs towards the top where the priest figure (Fernando Hernández) has already ascended. The Mayan priest is carrying the flaming sword described in the Book of Genesis from the first scene of the film as the Mayan

priest holds the flaming sword and says (in the subtitles) to the *conquistador*: “First Father sacrificed himself for the Tree of Life. Enter and Join his fate.”<sup>14</sup>

Tomas and the priest charge at each other. Tomas only has a stone blade and the priest wounds Tom in with another small blade. The priest wounds Tomas with a dagger, and then says loudly, “Death is the road to awe!” as he takes the sword to deliver a deadly blow. The camera adopts the perspective of Tomas when he is looking upon his wound and when he sees the flaming sword coming toward him. Captain Tomas exists in the timeline of the past as the protagonist of Izzi’s book, which depicts a fantastical version of imperial Spain.

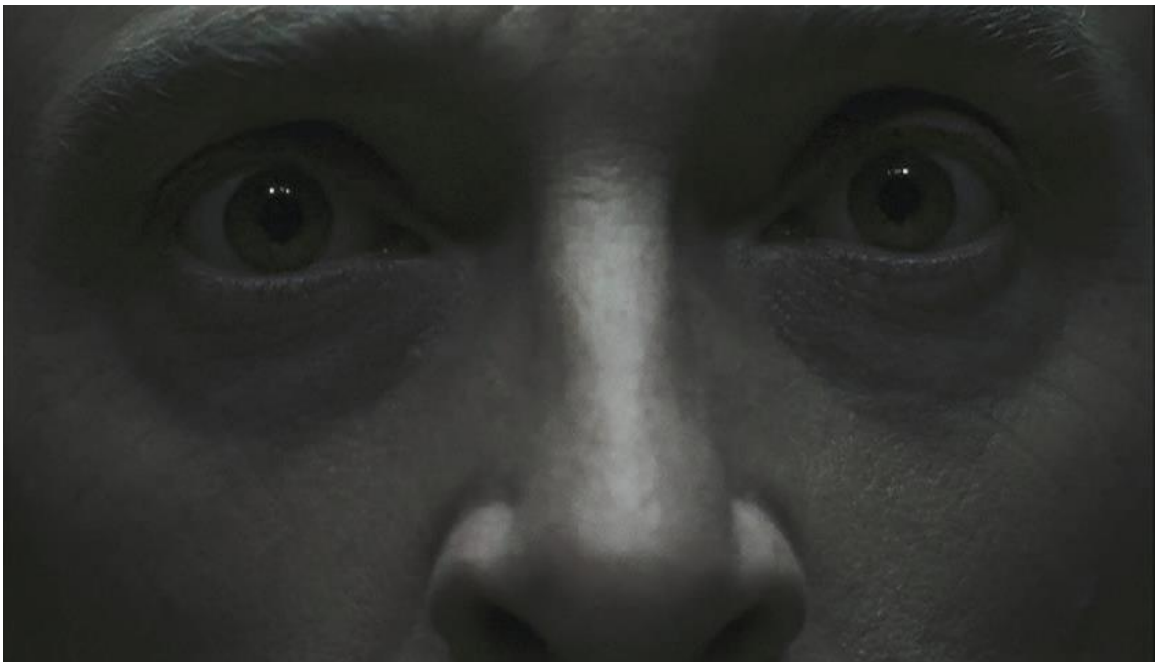


**Figure 3** The Mayan priest stabs Tomas (*The Fountain*, 2006)

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<sup>14</sup>*The Fountain*. Dir. Darren Aronofsky. Perf. Hugh Jackman, Rachel Weisz, Ellen Burstyn, Mark Margolis, Stephen McHattie, Sean Patrick Thomas, Donna Murphy, Ethan Suplee, Cliff Curtiss and Fernando Hernandez. Warner Brothers, 2006. Film.

In addition to the past, the film incorporates a timeline of the future. The moment the Mayan priest's flaming sword overtakes the frame, the film has a jump cut to the future timeline of the film, where the space traveler, Tom, is sitting in a Treeship, a circular orb housing a dying tree. Tom travels towards the dying star Xibalba. The jump cut transitions from the blinding flame of the sword of the Mayan Priest in the past to the eyes of Tom in the future. His eyes open as if awakening from a nightmare, and he is screaming as he sits in a yoga pose. His body forms a triangle shape in a lotus posture, or *padmasana*, but the first image we see of the future timeline in the film is Tom's eyes.<sup>15</sup> Tom is a futuristic configuration of Tommy's character, and he travels in space within a circular Treeship.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 4** The eyes of Tom awakening in his Treeship (*The Fountain*, 2006)

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<sup>15</sup>Kaminoff, Leslie, and Amy Matthews. *Yoga Anatomy*. Human Kinetics, 2012. P 127.

<sup>16</sup> As Skorin-Kapov has confirmed with Aronofsky, Tom is an homage to Major Tom in "Space Oddity," the song of David Bowie from 1969. (Skorin-Kapov47)

The tree in his Treeship is sentient with fibers that move to his touch. The tree sustains him as the first sequence of future Tom shows him lifting away a portion of the bark and consuming it in a solemn manner like the Host in a Roman Catholic sacrament. The frame which zooms in on Tom's eyes in a shadowy, dim light is important because the whole film shows the perception and the emotional journey of Tommy (and Tom and Tomas) as a journey from the shadow to the light as he learns to accept death. The transition from Tom to Tommy begins when future Tom is ready to see what Izzi wants him to see. Izzi from the present timeline haunts him, echoing the same words the viewer heard in the lips of the *conquistador* "finish it" while she wears the ring. Tom is distressed by his flashbacks of his wife Izzi, whom he sees in a winter coat and then in a hospital bed. Both images are references to the present timeline, where Izzi has terminal cancer. Future Tom finally concedes and says, "show me," before the film transitions to the present timeline of Tommy. The film uses the posture of Tom to transport the scene from a Treeship traveling through space to a medical office.

Dr. Tommy Creo and his wife, Izzi Creo, exist in the present time. The film returns to the storyline of Tomas and the past each time Dr. Tom Creo begins to read the manuscript or, as shown at the beginning of the film, Izzi Creo is writing the manuscript. The *conquistador* travels to New Spain (colonial Mexico) to search for the biblical Tree of Life to save his queen, Isabel, from the wrath of the Spanish Inquisition led by the Grand Inquisitor Silecio (Stephen McHattie) to take over Spain. Within her manuscript, Izzi uses images of a *conquistador* and his queen, a Mayan pyramid and priest, the

Spanish Inquisition, and a Moorish palace—all to change the way her husband conceives of death and its dark associations.

In the present timeline, the film shows Izzi visiting a museum exhibit of Mayan codices. After suffering a seizure at the museum, Izzi is hospitalized as her cancer is in an advanced stage. As Izzi recovers at the hospital, Tommy returns to the laboratory more desperate for positive results. He finds out the compound is beneficial for Alzheimer's, but not cancer, and his team sees his emotional deterioration. His supervisor, Lillian, is shocked that Tommy left Izzi alone at the hospital. Lillian goes to visit her. That is when Izzi asks to be buried on Lillian's farm. The conversation Izzi has with Tommy after meeting with Lillian is the last before her death.

The futuristic figure of Tom is the most ambiguous of the three configurations in the film. According to Skorin-Kapov in her book, *Darren Aronofsky's Films and the Fragility of Hope*, Tom is a hallucinatory dream of the future manifesting the inner turbulence of Tommy's psyche—his inner space travel (47). The evidence in the film is contradictory and ambiguous. Past, present, and future interweave to seem indistinguishable from each other with an underlying unity among them. This unity and circularity are persistent within every technical aspect of the film as well, including the musical score, cinematography, set design, props, and editing.

Ultimately, both could be imaginary versions of Tommy, which Izzi might have written for her manuscript. Izzi says her book starts in Spain but ends in Xibalba. Tom and his Treeship are traveling in space, floating up towards Xibalba. Izzi's words to Tommy as she is peering through the telescope while stargazing on the roof are the most

reliable confirmation that the futuristic Tom and his Treeship must also exist within her book. On the snowy roof, Izzi tells Tommy resolutely that her book begins in Spain but ends in Xibalba.



**Figure 5** Future Tom in a lotus posture in his Treeship (*The Fountain*, 2006)

On the other hand, Skorin-Kapov's interpretation is a strong possibility because Tom's emotional distress is on the same register as Tommy's emotional frustration with his wife's condition. Tom sees Izzi from the present, and the figure of Izzi in the form of Queen Isabel from Izzi's manuscript—both images of Izzi stem from the mind, memory, and imagination of Tommy. In each moment of emotional turmoil or meditation, the film cuts to Tom as a reflection of the inner life of Dr. Tommy Creo. Lastly, the most persuasive evidence to support Skorin-Kapov's designation of future Tom as a figment of Tommy's imagination is his tattoo on his ring finger. Tom tattoos himself with the same worn nib pen Izzi gives him when she is in the hospital in the present timeline.

Tom and Tomas represent Tommy's final understanding of Izzi's acceptance of death as an act of creation. Izzi's writing anchors his imagination, but there are three teaching moments between Tommy and Izzi, where Izzi orally transmits the narrative Tommy needs to accept to understand his wife's perspective of death. First, Izzi teaches Tommy about death in Mayan cosmology and shows him the dying star, which represents Xibalba when they are looking through the telescope together. Second, Izzi teaches Tommy about creation in Mayan mythology and the sacrifice of First Father, whose body formed the earth and the heavens when he finds her at the museum exhibition of Mayan codices. The third and last moment Izzi teaches Tom to view death as she does, is in their last conversation together, when she gifts Tommy a pen and ink, and then tells him about what her Mayan guide relayed to her about his own father's death.

Izzi gifts Tommy an old-fashioned nib pen with an inkwell and tells him to help her finish the manuscript, with only the last chapter remaining. When she tells him to "finish it," he replies that he does not know how it ends. Izzi answers back that he does, that he will. Tommy is visibly disturbed, but Izzi holds him and tells him about what a Mayan guide, Moisés Morales,<sup>17</sup> told her about his own father's death:

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<sup>17</sup>This name from the film is based on a real person who is a well-known guide and scholar of Palenque. His interview by Carol Karasik is an amazing perspective on archaeology (of which he is very critical), anthropology and the nature and importance of Palenque. The name was recognized by a journalist who interviewed Aronofsky.

"Maya Exploration Center: Resources." *Maya Exploration Center: Resources*, Maya Exploration Center (MEC), <http://www.mayaexploration.org/resources.php>. Accessed 4 Feb. 2020.

Guillen, Michael. "The Fountain-Roundtable Interview With Darren Aronofsky." *ScreenAnarchy*, 15 Nov. 2006, [screenanarchy.com/2006/11/the-fountainroundtable-interview-with-darren-aronofsky.html](http://screenanarchy.com/2006/11/the-fountainroundtable-interview-with-darren-aronofsky.html). Web.



The last night I was with him, he told me about his father, who had died. But Moses wouldn't believe it. ...He said: if they dug his father's body up, he would be gone. They planted a seed over his grave. The seed became a tree. Moses said his father became part of that tree. He grew into the wood, into the bloom. And when a sparrow ate the tree's fruit, his father flew with the birds. He said...death was his father's road to awe. That's what he called it—the road to awe. Now, I've been trying to write the last chapter, and I haven't been able to get that out of my head.<sup>18</sup>

Izzi tells Tommy she is not afraid anymore, and after Tommy stays in the hospital that night, Izzi passes away in the hospital. Tommy is angry in his grief when he returns home after Izzi's funeral. He loses his wedding ring after operating on Donovan, so he stabs his finger with the nib pen and ink in the place where his wedding ring should have been. Since the initial pricking of his finger takes place after Izzi's funeral, the tattoo rings which extend along the arm of future Tom must stem from Tommy's imagination, and not Izzi's writing. Future Tom has a degraded version of the same penIzzi gives to Tommy on her deathbed.

Future Tom is another element of the circular imagery that pervades in every image and element of the film. He represents Tommy's imagination and emotions. Future Tom appears at the beginning of the film, but he is the final chapter of Izzi's manuscript, which Tommy imagines as he learns to accept Izzi's death. Izzi creates the beginning of the manuscript in writing. With Izzi's guidance, Tommy creates the end of the manuscript in his imagination. When they are stargazing on the roof, and Tommy asks if she has finished her book, and when he can read it, a solemn expression passes on Izzi's face. This conversation is foreshadowing the fact that Izzi means to leave the

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<sup>18</sup> Transcribed by me from the film. (*The Fountain*, 2006)

manuscript unfinished for Tommy. She is solemn because she knows Tommy is the one who must finish writing the book after she is gone so that he can understand death as an act of creation and rebirth.



**Figure 6** Future Tom's worn nib pen (*The Fountain*, 2006)

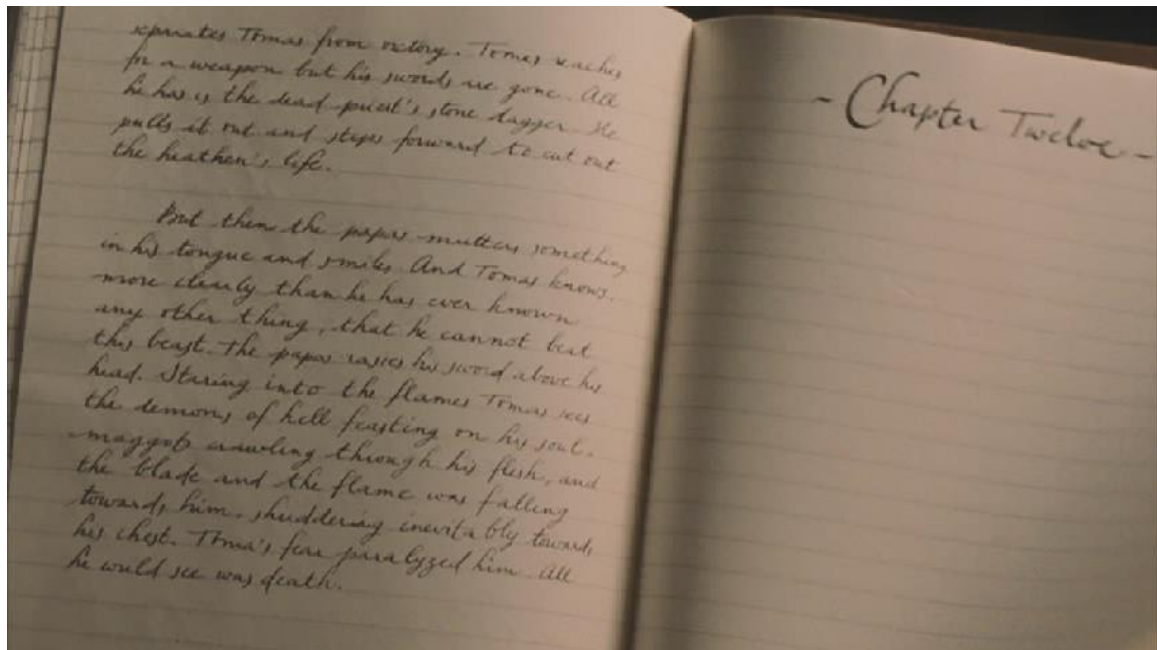
The words Tom and Tomas speak in the past and future are echoes of Izzi's words in the present timeline with Tommy. Izzi's epigraph shown at the beginning of the film is the end of her writing. There are no subsequent scenes of Izzi writing the manuscript because she gives Tommy the guidance and information; he needs to understand how the manuscript and the journey must end. Tomas and the Mayan priest speak the same words Izzi says to Tommy on her deathbed: "finish it" and "death is the road to awe." In front of the makeshift altar, Tomas utters the words: "finish it," and in the temple, the Mayan priest utters the second phrase, "death is the road to awe." The last scene in the book and the last words in the epigraph conjure the flaming sword. Izzi's words mark both the

mind and body of Tommy in the metaphorical sense, and the film echoes the permanence of Izzi's narrative upon Tommy with the image of him tattooing his flesh like the words Izzi writes upon a page. After the funeral of Izzi, Tommy finds the blank pages at the end of Izzi's manuscript with the text onscreen showing the scene in the temple. through the pages and searching for more of Izzi's words without any success, Tommy drops the book and then spills the inkwell and pricks his flesh with the nib pen (Figure 7).



**Figure 7** Tommy piercing his finger with the nib pen (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The film's jump cuts create a sense of simultaneity between the timelines of past, present, and future because Tommy exists in all three forms at once. This nonlinear chronology communicates the broader vision Izzi is trying to communicate with her husband. Death can be a beginning, not just an end. The film continually incorporates circular imagery echoed in the temporal structure, set design, and cinematography. The first circular component is time. The film begins at the end of the journey.

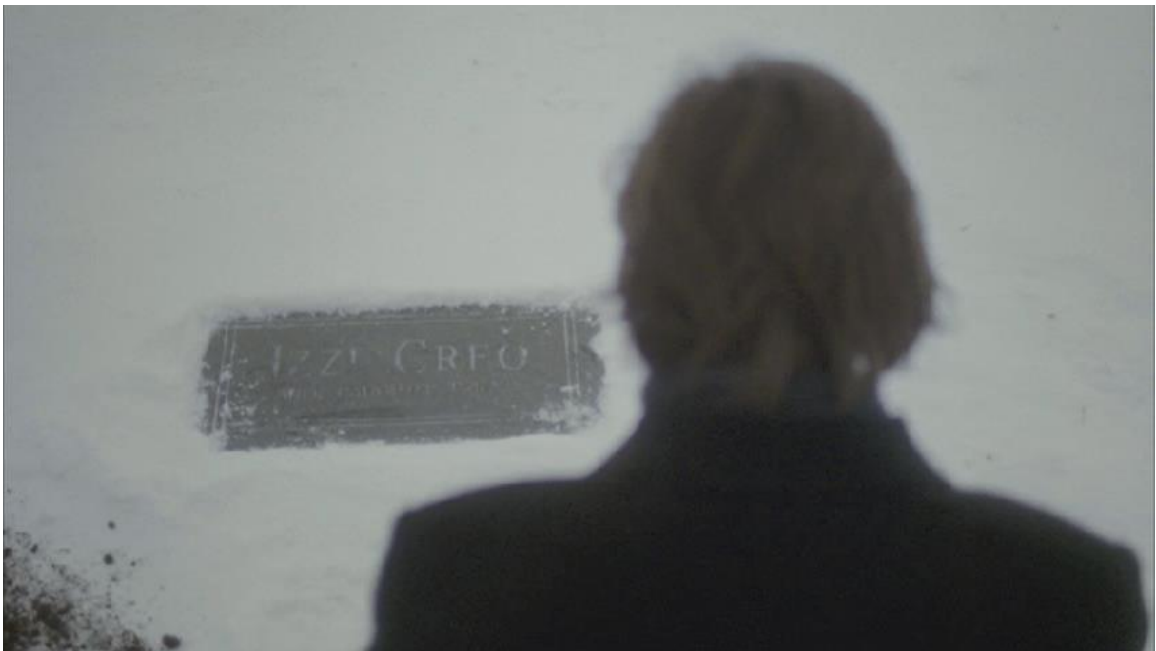


**Figure 8** The last page of Izzi's writing (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The *conquistador* speaks the words “finish it” at the very beginning of the film. The beginning of the film depicts the end of the *conquistador*'s quest. The *conquistador* has already reached his destination in New Spain, and ascends the Mayan temple. After Izzi shows Tommy the nebula in the microscope, he starts reading her manuscript; the viewer sees Tomas receiving the mission to journey to find the Tree of Life from the Book of Genesis hidden in New Spain to save Queen Isabel from the wrath of the Inquisition. Aronofsky and Ari Handel have taken liberties with the historical facts surrounding the Catholic Monarchs and the Inquisition; King Ferdinand does not enter the storyline.

The transitions and cuts between the present and the imaginary future and past in Izzi's manuscript create temporal order, which is both linear and cyclical. Izzi's disease and her death is a linear narrative in the timeline of the present. Izzi's writing and

Tommy's reading acts of the manuscript follow a circular temporal order which orbit around different moments of the present timeline. This hybrid temporal order appears through faded transitions and jump cuts. The film's transitions fade between frames and use visual elements like bridges from one shot to another to create a cyclical sensation of return and rebirth. The editing communicates the unity that Tommy is searching for in every timeline of the film.<sup>19</sup>



**Figure 9** Tommy at Izzi's grave at the end of the film (*The Fountain*, 2006)

Past, present, and future seem contemporaneous. Through multiple cuts and visual motifs, the film creates a sense of simultaneity among all versions of Tommy as all three quests are parallel in their beginning premise and their ending conclusion. The manuscript is Izzi's means of making Tommy see death through her perspective. Within the linear progression of Izzi's death, Tommy's consciousness is continuously making

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<sup>19</sup> (Corrigan 66)

circles. The film purposely breaks with linear chronologies across the times and spaces shown. In addition to breaking with a linear, chronological structure, the film asserts temporal circularity. The narrative structure of the film rotates around a single moment when Izzi asks Tom to come out and walk in the snow with her. He has too much work, and he refuses to go with her. In the last permutation he runs to her, he runs to the light and stops trying to prevent death. The film ends with Tommy finally accepting Izzi's vision of death, planting a seed upon Izzi's grave. The corporal metaphor for Izzi's body ends with the image of return the promise of a seed growing into a tree after the white snow of winter—death as an act of creation.

### **Dark Figures in the Forest**

The film demonstrates the emotional journey of Tommy in his movement through light and shadow. Tommy's journey (and the journeys of his reimagined forms Tomas and Tom) moves from darkness to light. After the lighted image of the words, the first space is the darkness of a jungle in the Yucatán, where Captain Tomas and his two comrades contemplate a dark path leading to the ascending slope of a Mayan pyramid. Tommy and both his reimagined avatars start the film in the dark, physically and metaphorically. Tomas is in a dark jungle. Dr. Tom Creo is in the darkness of his office. Lastly, Tom is first seen in a shadow as he travels through space.

This darkness mirrors the darkness before the creation of the heavens and the earth in the Book of Genesis. In this narrative of creation, and God grants light over

primordial darkness.<sup>20</sup> The environment of the jungle at the beginning of the film echoes that primordial darkness. There is a complete absence of any speech except the words of the *conquistador*. The verse from the Book of Genesis is the only medium of interpretation that prefaces the charge of the Mayan temple and the warriors guarding it. The movement between light and darkness reiterates the Orientalist imagination. In the film, darkness projects a sinister threat and emptiness upon the surrounding space and the natural setting in sharp contrast to the illuminated book. The interplay of darkness in the forest, and the bright lighting of the text, reiterates the symbolism of darkness associated with chaos and disorder, barbarism, and violence projected upon the bodies and images of colonized Others.

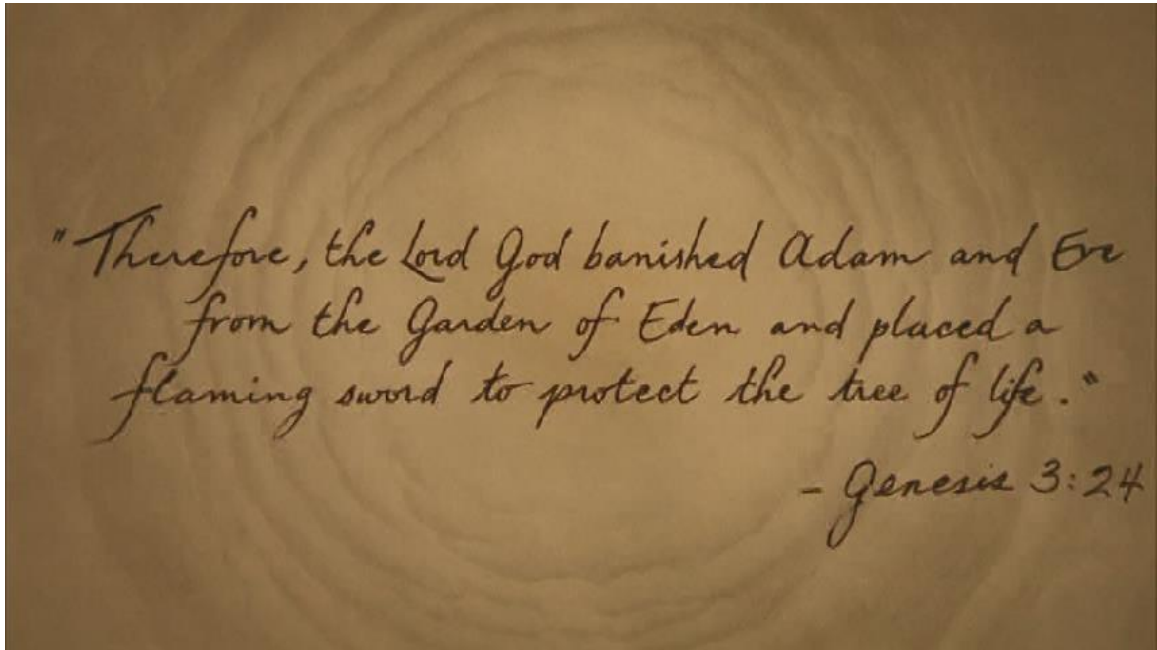
*The Fountain* conveys an example of Mignolo's *colonial semiotics* as the audience sees a hierarchy and interpretive power of one system of knowledge over another. The beginning of the film privileges the projection of Biblical and Christian religious imagery over the reimagined bodies of colonized people and spaces. When the film starts, the screen is dark until it brightens to show a hand and the pen of an unknown, unnamed figure writing upon a blank page. The handwritten epigraph from the Book of Genesis becomes the epistemic framing of the film.

The verse from the Book of Genesis sets the epistemic framework, a matrix which filters the rest of the film and becomes the frame through which the viewer perceives and interprets all the proceeding images and information of the film's composition and plot. This verse constructs the foundation of the images depicted in the film. The words

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<sup>20</sup> (Armstrong 14-15)

illuminated become problematic when the narrative of creation from the Book of Genesis is the filter for viewing Mayan codices.

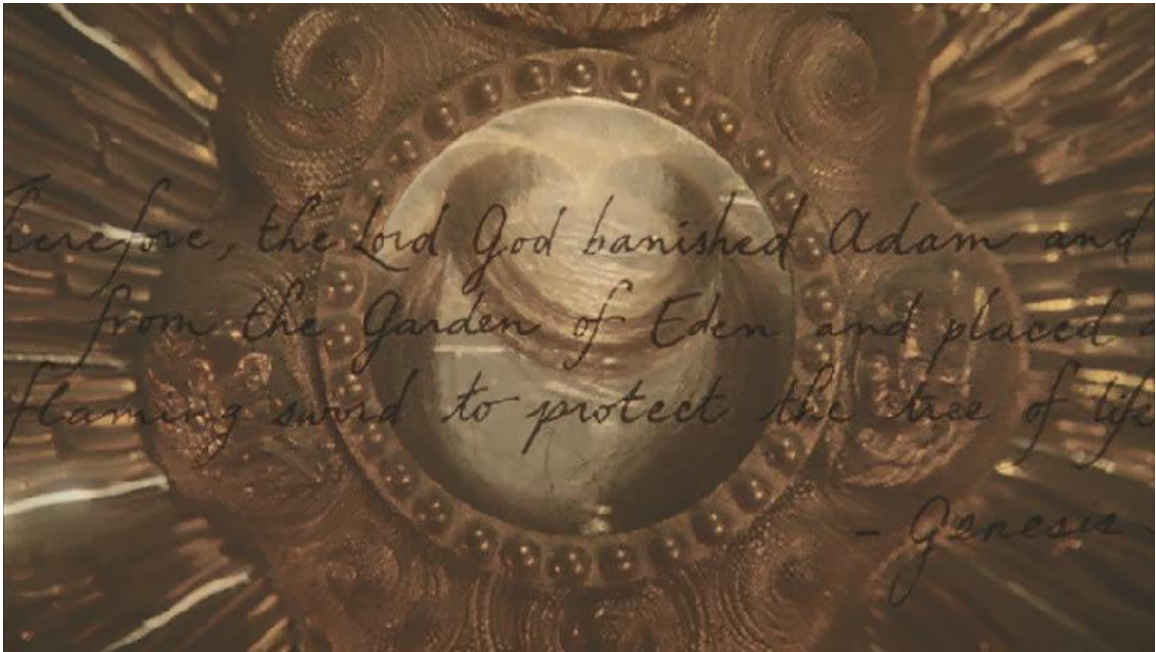


**Figure 10** Dissolve from the Book of Genesis and Xibalba (*The Fountain*, 2006)

Though the film does eventually determine which timelines are fictional and which are real, the imagination of Izzi still reinforces the interpretation of colonized bodies through imperial frameworks of knowledge. This fantastical imagination reinforces the imperial vision, which imposed Christian narratives on non-Christian bodies. Moreover, the epistemic matrix operates within multiple layers in the film. Within the manuscript, a Franciscan friar (Mark Margolis) and Queen Isabel use the Book of Genesis to interpret bodies of land in New Spain and the meanings of Mayan sacred spaces. These exoticized spaces appear as remote and fantastical, while medieval



Spain and Al-Andalus appear as known historical settings that are more familiar and intimate.



**Figure 11** Dissolve from of the Book of Genesis and Xibalba to the monstrance in a makeshift altar of the conquistador containing locks of hair of Queen Isabel (*The Fountain*, 2006)

Non-European bodies appear imagined and interpreted through a foreign gaze. This scene filters all the following scenes depicting bodies of texts, lands (maps), flora, constellations, and non-European, non-Christian, non-White bodies within the film. The Book of Genesis forms the *locus of enunciation*: knowledge imposed upon conquered communities. The verse from the Book of Genesis initiates the mythology of conquest—the constellation of tropes of imperial domination over indigenous bodies of land, knowledge, and people. The first figure subsumed in this epistemic lens of the film is the Mayan priest (Fernando Hernández) atop the Mayan pyramid modeled on Tikal.

In conquest, bodies of lands and peoples were *translated for imperial legibility* in ways they could be easily understood, dominated, and then exploited. Colonial narratives could *create* reality rather than *reflecting* it. Colonial agents like Christopher Columbus were *interpreters* of reality who were *reading* nature, lands, and peoples with epistemic filters like the Bible and other travel narratives, which often included fantastical detail and exaggeration.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 12** The Mayan priest with a flaming sword (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The figure of the Mayan priest appears within the imaginary narrative of Tomas in Izzi's manuscript. He is a figure in darkness—an obstacle marking the trajectory of Tomas (and Tommy) from shadow to light. Matthew Libatique, the cinematographer,

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<sup>21</sup>Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Conquest of America the Question of the Other*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1999. Print.

describes the visual motif he used as Tommy's character is always touched by shadow when he appears in the film, while Izzi is continuously in the light. The film ultimately depicts Tommy's journey into the light, to join Izzi. The lighting on Izzi represents metaphorical enlightenment as she accepts her mortality. The visual interplay of light and shadow communicates the emotional journeys of the characters and their reimagined forms in the manuscript. However, the film reinforces the metaphorical shadow of *colonial semiotics* because of the reimagined figures of colonized peoples like the Mayan priest, and the Mayan warriors never leave the shadows within Izzi's and Tommy's imagination.

Aronofsky and the production team did extensive research to align the images of the Christian rituals with Mayan metaphysical conceptions. The Tree of Life from the Book of Genesis and blends with the image of the World Tree in the film. The shaman is the specialist in allowing men to move beyond death, and the story of the Popol Vuh, of the First Father killed in Xibalba, the Maya Otherworld, only to be reborn (Friedel, Schele, Parker 77). While it contains the content and potential for an attempted plurality of perspectives and form, a possible plunge into *pluritopical hermeneutics*, Mignolo's borrowed term from Raimundo Panikkar, the images still create absence in the representation of Mayan bodies read through Biblical letters (11). The information and findings have changed and evolved as archaeologists continue to herald in new evidence and research, but the film still creates a silence with all the images and information involved. Both Amerindian and Arab in conflated multitudes and shallow props, nature is

also a passive object to be reformed and manipulated in silence within the dominant, Eurocentric *locus of enunciation*.

Every trace of Mayan bodies and cultures is shrouded in darkness and removed through distance in time, space, and imagination. The film reinscribes a conception of the Westernized Self mirrored, opposed, and transformed through the easternized, darker, silenced Others. The character of Tomas is entering a Mayan temple, but the film connects to space directly to the verse from the Book of Genesis. The spaces of the Mayan Other are removed from the present timeline of Tommy and Izzi. Firstly, the Mayan pyramid, warriors, and the priest are entirely fictional in the logic of the film. They only appear as creations within Izzi's imagination of an epic quest.



**Figure 13** First scene depicting the Mayan warriors in New Spain (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The first appearance of the non-European figures for the viewer cements the representation of the Mayan civilization in varying shades of darkness, and the figures

never enter the same light as Tomas, Tom, or Tommy. The darkness propels a sense of danger and the unknown and also causes the impression of a void. The Mayans in this scene never speak without subtitles. Even the words which articulate Aronofsky's research into Mayan cosmology are only perceived through the meanings derived from the written or spoken words of Izzi. The viewer sees Izzi's hands writing the Book of Genesis before hearing the words of the Mayan priest.

Nature and natives become obsolete as obstacles to be stepped over or sliced through in his quest. The *conquistador* cuts through the mass of Mayan warriors like the branches and brush of the forest itself—all meld into the native territory mastered and maneuvered by Tomas. In the beginning scenic development, we see the *conquistadors* approach a “trap,” and we see the dark jungle surround them. All of them wear metallic helmets, and two of them are still unnamed, but they do name the figures which appear out of the darkness: “pagans.” Two of the Conquistadors both retreat and die as they try to escape. The man we met at the beginning is left alone. This image of one against a mass is a perpetuation of the image of one White figure against a mass of darker figures. If we pause the shot where we see their faces, it is a stark contrast with the illuminated close-ups we observe later on. All we see is a mass of nameless faces half shrouded in darkness. The scene is almost complete darkness. The bodies of Mayan warriors manifest a threat collectively. They are devices, part of the trap in the forest, like the bones and stakes, and the tall gates which close in on Tomas.

Once he ascends the pyramid, he sees a darkened path with a lighted destination, and that is the first visual trope that repeats itself within multiple spaces and sceneries of

the film. Dr. Tommy Creo's office is dark. The entire laboratory is dark because this is the space Tommy obsesses in misguided efforts and begins his journey with a total denial of death. The exception to this darkness occurs when Tommy moves across space, towards a destination bathed in light. Izzi's body is always shrouded in light because Tommy's ultimate desire is to be with Izzi—a union with Izzi.

The seizure Izzi is an image of light. Light and darkness form a major theme from the text of the Book of Genesis, which precedes the verse from the opening scene of the film. The film begins with a verse on creation in order to initiate the imagery of the cycle of life and connect creation to the ultimate theme of death. Light and dark, black and white. The visual binary has a compelling parallel in the visual binary and logic of colonial semiotics, which paints colonizer and colonized in a binary model: civilized/barbaric, good/bad, noble/evil. The film is beautiful, but the audience is continually seeing a binary black and white, light, and shadow.

We will learn the names and systems of Tom and Izzi, but as the film continues, we will never learn the name of the Mayan soldier, or the warriors and even when we do get one name, Ariel, the name of the Moorish comrade of Tomas, it will only be in service to the quest. The Moorish warrior comes to the aid of Tomas to usher him to his Queen, all the while walking behind Tomas and staying in the shadow of the path to the light. He is only presented within the limited duality of ally or enemy, nothing in between. As an ally, he serves on the journey. When he is converted to the enemy of the quest with his concerns for survival and his attack of the priest, he is killed and pushed aside.

The Moorish and Mayan warriors only have two roles, silent ally or a silenced threat with nothing in between. The Moorish warrior comes to the aid of Tomas to usher him to his Queen, all the while walking behind Tomas and staying in the shadow of the path to the light. He is only presented within the limited duality of ally or enemy, nothing in between. As an ally, he serves on the journey. When he is converted to the enemy of the quest with his concerns for survival and his attack of the priest, he is killed and pushed aside. The Mayan priest serves as a threshold to be crossed, an obstacle to be passed over.

The first version we see of Dr. Tommy Creo is Captain Tomas the *conquistador*, which is how Izzi has imagined him within her manuscript. The character stands out for his emotions and reactions as his facial features are brought to view within a close up so that his face occupies the majority of the space of the frame. The entire frame of the shot may be overtaken by the face of one when it comes to Tom and Izzi, but the dark figures which color their imagination are always in shadow, in collective masses or invisible. It is a distance maintained to separate the onslaught of a multitude shaded in darkness, the collective, dark mass of natives interspersed amongst the leaves and skulls in the pathway which attack upon the invasion of the soldier and his comrades, none of whom survive. The dark mass of the multitude is the first unnamed, collective Other we encounter within the film, and as a collective, they are defeated, abated, or subdued quickly and painlessly.

The film reinforces the image of one versus many as Tomas Verde is the one solitary European soldier fighting his way through a mass of Mayan warriors. The Mayan warriors are the first appearance of non-European bodies, non-Christian, non-White

bodies. Every set design and scene composition in Aronofsky's film conveys symmetry, but this scene in the jungle represents a moment of asymmetry in the representation of the Mayan warriors. Their group possesses no symmetry as they appear as a nebulous threat and obstacle to Tomas with their spears and knives, and then they carry Tomas to the foot of the pyramid. None of their faces can be perceived, and they form background as they raise and throw the body of the conquistador. They are present, yet they are absent in speech and agency.

The close-ups of Izzi and Tom, Isabel, and Tomas contrast with the distance and reduced space granted to the Darker Others. This contrasts with multiple forms, names, faces, and close-up lighted shots for Tom and Izzi. The Mayans make up the scenery. They are part of the trap set by the environment, and they are elements that make up the path to Tom's Destiny and Ascension to the Pyramid and the Tree of Life. They mark the geography of his quest, but they are nameless encounters. This facial visibility is the first thematic contrast we see in the film between light and darkness. The faces of Tom and Izzi are lit brightly and brought close before the gaze, just like the manuscript.

Mignolo's work helps us understand how colonial knowledge was *created* at the expense of destroying, suppressing, or even merely misunderstanding indigenous knowledge systems of colonized territories. The representation of indigenous, unidentified, unnamed bodies is subsidiary to the quest of the White figure. Non-European figures in the film exist contained within the roles written for them within an image, which echoes the imperial vision.





**Figure 14** The first scene depicting Captain Ariel (*The Fountain*, 2006)

First, the unnamed native warriors and the Moorish warrior, Captain Ariel (Cliff Curtiss), serve the role of threats, obstacles removed, and overcome as parts of a quest in the timeline of the past with Captain Tomas. Secondly, the Mayan priest serves as the bridge—the gateway from one realm to the next. Lastly, the Mayan Guide, Moisés Morales, of whom Izzi speaks to explain to Tommy the final conception of her death, is a native informant whose voice is mediated through Izzi and whose information is solely used for the spiritual transformations of the figures of Izzi and Tommy.

In the first scene, the Mayan warriors and their bodies meld with the jungle the *conquistador* cuts through; they appear more like scenery and less like subjects. In the scene, a group of three Spaniards approaches the temple when the viewer sees an onslaught of Mayan warriors guarding the sacred temple charge towards them in a nebulous, shadowy mass. The Mayan warriors make up a nameless, exotic, threatening

mass that surrounds the one *Conquistador* who fights his way through the dark mass. Matthew Restall has dissected this image of barbarian hordes who swarm like bees around the small band of White *conquistadors*, who overcome terrible odds despite being outnumbered (44).

The film propels this myth of conquest<sup>22</sup> by eliding the standard protocol Spaniards used when they would acquire native allies and interpreters, which provided invaluable information to navigate a foreign terrain, as well as to supply necessary military strength for survival (Restall 23). Native forces and Africans, both free and enslaved, accompanied European campaigns and often exceeded their European counterparts in number (Restall 45). Also, these native allies were not merely passive pawns, but had their ambitions and pursued their self-interest through the Spanish presence (Restall 48). The first image of Izzi's *conquistador* descends from this mythology, which made the native and African auxiliary figures of Spanish conquest invisible within the popular imagery of colonialism.

The imagery of the film subsumes the bodies of the Mayan warriors within an aura of adventure, and the historical conquest undertakes the same tone as an action film. The dark bodies of the Mayans and the Moor are obstacles removed from Tommy's path, lacking any personalities besides being belligerent or subservient. They lack an inner life below the surface. In direct contrast, Tommy and Izzi are depicted with psychological depth, as described by Skorin-Kapov:

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<sup>22</sup>Restall, Matthew. *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Aronofsky's style combines elements of adventure/action movies, testifying to his growing up in the Spielberg-Lucas era of the 1980s, but the action often turns from the exterior environment to the interior psychic space of his protagonists, allowing us to look into the psychological challenges they go through, often visible on their bodies. (xxvi)

The film focuses on the flesh of the protagonists. The imagery of their corporeality conveys their psychic transformation. The tattoos on Tom's arm connect to the circularity of time, the circular nebula of Xibalba, evoke the imagery of the circles in tree bark, and foreshadow his eventual sacrifice and transformation in the form of First Father. As Skorin-Kapov highlights in her introduction, Aronofsky's storytelling always features strange but memorable characters who "project their inner turbulence and psychic states onto their bodies," and Aronofsky goes about exposing his characters "from the inside out" (xxiv, xxvii). Tom's body and bodily transformation is a manifestation of Tommy's transformed perception of death. In contrast, the markings upon the bodies of the Mayan warriors and the Mayan priest reinforce exterior signs and invisibility of the mythology of conquest.

The second example of a warrior that serves as the subsidiary to the *conquistador* appears in the scene when the *conquistador* Tomas is walking within the Moorish palace. As the character of Tomas draws from the Christian soldier of Iberian imperialism-the conquistador and the "knight" of chivalric tales fighting to honor his queen-all other warrior images are darkened and made Other. In other words, the conglomeration of Spaniard, conquistador, *caballero* represented in the White, Christian figure of Tomas is the narrative with which the audience identifies and aligns with while the non-White, non-European figures are auxiliary or antagonistic to Tomas's character.

Tommy's quest to cure his wife is framed through the imagery of conquest. The belligerent Moorish soldier, the Mayan warriors, and the Mayan priest become two-dimensional subsidiary elements in the manuscript. They can only exist to help Tomas reach the mythical Tree of Life. They can only deliver Tomas closer to his goal, or perish along his path. Firstly, we see the Mayan warriors are silent obstacles which are knocked down or removed to the side as Tomas makes his way to the top of the pyramid. They are unnamed and form a dark mass, blending in with the scenery of the jungle, like leaves cut down. They represent a barrier for him to pass through, and they do not speak.

Their primary purpose in the story is to serve as catalysts and thresholds to Tom's and Izzi's imagination of death. Ariel, the Moorish soldier, is shown as violent and, ultimately, as lacking in faith. The actor who plays him is not Arab. In his work, Said also mentions the imagery of the Oriental Other with silence and shadow within the Orientalist vision. Said describes how the Orient as an imagined and narrated place became an epistemological entity, a body of knowledge that scholars were able to draw from because the discourse crafted to know and to control the colonized was dependent on *the Oriental's* absence. Knowledge of the Oriental made the Oriental controllable and invisible:

What these widely diffused notions of the Orient depended on was the almost total absence in contemporary Western culture of the Orient as a genuinely felt and experienced force. For a number of evident reasons, the Orient was always in a position both of outsider and incorporated weak partner for the West. To the extent that Western scholars were aware of contemporary Orientals or Oriental movements of thought and culture, these were perceived either as silent shadows to be animated by the Orientalist, brought into reality by him, or as a kind of cultural and intellectual proletariat useful for the Orientalist's grander

interpretative activity, necessary for his performance as superior judge, learned man, powerful cultural will. I mean to say that in discussions of the Orient, the Orient is all absence, whereas one feels the Orientalist and what he says as presence; yet we must not forget that the Orientalist's presence is enabled by the Orient's effective absence. (Said 208)

The figures and texts which would have figured as “Orientals or Oriental movements of thought and culture” in nineteenth-century British and French scholarship of “the East” are either absent, imagined, or only occupy secondary off-screen roles, the margins of each page and the edges of each frame. The film tells a story while reinforcing the associations of non-White, non-Christian, non-European and non-Western figures and cultures characteristic of nineteenth-century Orientalism as Said described it. The representation of Captain Ariel, the Mayan Shaman, the Mayan warriors, and the Mayan guide are all placed in the background of the plot as they are temporally and spatially removed from the protagonists, resulting in a representation which mirrors the “almost total absence” described by Said. They remain in shadow, to be incorporated and then dismissed- only to be imagined, explained, or mediated by Tommy or Izzi through the manuscript and the images on the screen. The Orient does not exist without the Orientalist, who maintains all interpretive agency to animate, create, and define the Other.

The Dark Other has no agency to write his reality. In contrast, Queen Isabel/Izzi possesses the power to transform herself through her writing of the imagination and transferring that narrative to her husband. Within the colonial narrative of the past and Izzi takes an alternative within the futuristic narrative of the future. The image of her hair is the sacrament in the monstrosity. She represents a possession Tomas Verde, and

Captain Tom is always carrying with him and even worshipping through the corporal and ritual associations of Izzi's body and the body of Christ. Captain Tom also provides a representation of his own body reimagined in the form of First Father. Both of these physical representations and transformations of Izzi and Tom align with the Book of Genesis. Biblical imagery is the privileged perspective and perception of all the events, real and fantastical, which follow.

The Bible in itself is not a form of violence, but the repeating gesture of using a text to project upon a context removed, foreign and independent bodies is the gesture which performs the epistemic violence, of *knowing* and *perceiving* the body and being of the Other, the land and nature foreign to the viewer according to the terms of the viewer, the one who perceives, as opposed to letting the one whom we perceive speak, write for herself according to her terms (names and language), her own time, her history and her conception of self (identity) – that is the violence of erasure.

The imperial gaze will relegate the Mayan warriors to the background of the jungle. At the beginning of the film, the Mayan warriors have no dialogue. Their purpose is confrontation, and they serve as stock images. The representational perspective belongs to Izzi, so Izzi will provide Tomas/Tom with all of the answers as she fills the role of the textual and oral storyteller for the entire epistemic process portrayed within the film:

... concern with the representation of the colonized focuses on the discourse of the colonizer, and one forgets to ask how the colonized represent themselves, how they depict and conceive themselves as well as how they speak for themselves without the need of self-appointed chroniclers, philosophers, missionaries, or men of letters to represent (depict as well as speak for) them. (Mignolo 332)

The visual motif of light and darkness marks the spiritual journey of Dr. Tom Creo but it also echoes the Orientalist vision. While the text is in the light and the native bodies<sup>23</sup> of Mayan warriors are in the darkness, the light upon the words and darkness upon the bodies reminds us of the system of forgetting inherent within coloniality: “a logical matrix, an epistemic mechanism to classify people around the planet and to rank them according to the matrix provided by the enunciator that naturalizes hierarchies and justifies domination” (Mignolo 441). When it is not silence, it is a veil, as the character of the Mayan Shaman is also given a close-up but, as discussed before, the spectator adopts the gaze of Tomas, not the unnamed Mayan priest, whose role possesses a parallel in both the Moorish warrior and the Grand Inquisitor<sup>24</sup>.

The film presents an unnamed group of natives in a Guatemalan jungle and a Mayan priest as a silent shadow mediated by Izzi in her manuscript she leaves after her death. Even spoken dialogue serves as the site of Izzi’s mediation as the stories she tells Tom about Xibalba while peering through a telescope on the roof of their home and while perusing through Mayan codices at the museum exhibition. Even spoken dialogue serves as the site of Izzi’s mediation as the stories she tells Tom about Xibalba while peering through a telescope on the roof of their home and while perusing through Mayan codices at the museum exhibition. The narrative belongs to Izzi alone.

The cinematography by Libatique repeats the interplay between light and darkness. As light and darkness are commonly drawn together as a metaphorical analogy

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<sup>23</sup> Aronofsky employed actual Mayan extras and actors and for these bodies and did not conflate Amerindian bodies and identities.

<sup>24</sup>

for knowledge/enlightenment and ignorance, the film portrays one man's journey through the darkness of his grief and denial toward enlightenment in his learning how to cope and accept his wife's mortality and then her death from a terminal form of brain cancer. Multiple sequences in the film show Tommy traveling down dark paths dotted with lights where Captain Tomas enters the pyramid, but the warriors remain below, in the shadows. The play on light and darkness comes to symbolize salvation and loss. However, this trope of light and dark has had darker implications in colonial histories. Amidst the latter, darkness provides a visual metaphor for the silence of the subaltern. It is a necessary silence within the process of coloniality.

The Mayan warriors remain in what Anne McClintock calls *anachronistic space* because as colonized people they “do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency—the living embodiment of the archaic ‘primitive’” (30).

### **Holy Trinity, Corporeal Divinity**

The corporal transformation of Tommy's avatars, which mirror the mythology of First Father in Linda Schele's work reinforces the mythology of how Europeans saw themselves reflected (projected) in the gaze of the Other—as gods. Matthew Restall, in his discussion of the apotheosis of Europe, breaks down the evidence surrounding the myth of European divinity to three words lost in translation (*cielo, teuli, Viracocha*). The



being of the colonized Other was not the only construction of conquest mythology; it involved an opposing construction of Self- or the perceived Self in the gaze of the Other. Restall cites GanangObeyesekere's work on *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook* (1992). Unwittingly, the film also repeats Biblical imagery in having three versions of Tommy, since his three-in-one presence mirrors the Holy Trinity.

The bodies of Tommy and Izzi are both made holy, while the others remain in the dark. Tommy's body is reimagined as a Mayan deity while Izzi's body becomes visually linked to the body of Christ. The *custodia* (monstrance) is the first image that links Izzi's body to the Host, the holy sacrament of the Roman Catholic rituals. The beginning of the film carries forth like an action/adventure film in the jungle, but it is prefaced with a holy text and a sacred object.



**Figure 15** The monstrance in New Spain after the first fade transition (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The beginning shot of the film fades from black into an illuminated manuscript, which is the Biblical Verse from Genesis. Before we even know the name of the film, the first scene which takes place in the jungle, occurs within a makeshift altar. We see a monstrance, used for displaying a sacred object. The pyx is the receptacle used to carry the host (the Eucharist), the symbolic sacrament of the Body of Christ. In the scene, the pyx contains a brown lock of hair.

Each monstrance foregrounds a colonized territory in the transatlantic Iberian empire. The first monstrance which appears in the film is in New Spain is set up in a makeshift altar in the Mayan jungle. The makeshift altar is all the audience sees, but the element in the background is the fact that this Christian altar is part of a colonial encampment in Mayan territory. The history of domination, violence and religious assimilation is never alluded to or acknowledged. The historical conquest is pushed to the margins in this narrative of romance and adventure—an exotic quest.

The second monstrance has eight-point stars, *rub el hizb*, in the background.<sup>25</sup> The *hammams*, bathhouses, of Al-Andalus, followed the model of the heated Roman baths which historically preceded them, but as Miguel Guitart points out, the *hammams* also possessed a unique architectural style of their own. Within the monstrance, the substance is an unclear substance with a golden hue, which is yet another mirrored image.

The triangular substance mirrors multiple images in other moments of the film: the golden clouds Dr. Tom Creo looks up to in the laboratory, and its golden hue evokes

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<sup>25</sup>Guitart, Miguel. "Buscando luz en la tierra: bajo las bóvedas del Baño Real del Palacio de Comares." *rita\_revistaindexada de textos académicos* 3 (2015): 106-111.

the golden nebula which surrounds Xibalba; it resembles the parchment of the map of New Spain, it evokes the triangular shape of the Mayan pyramid, and lastly, the round lens which magnifies it mirrors the microscope Dr. Tommy Creo uses in his lap to analyze the ethnobotanical compound from the tree in Guatemala before they use it in Donovan's surgery. Within the logic of the film, the substance must link to Izzi's body. The visual chirality in the film occupies the curiosity of the viewer who tries to make sense of the layers and layers of images, but the monstrance which forms the center of the symmetrical frame Libatique creates within the shot overshadows the mix of imagery which pertained to the *hammam* space of Al-Andalus.



**Figure 16** The monstrance imagined in Spain (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The unique construction of a monstrance is what lends itself to the visual themes of the film. It is circular, the object is encapsulated in a ring, and it is elevated like a star before darkness. The monstrance is a visual filter, just as the text is an epistemic filter,

for later images we will observe in the film. Later on, the image of Tommy in a space pod floating in the stars will recall this same image. The monstrance is significant as a device for display- for our visual consumption of a sacred object, like the Eucharist. In this scene, it is unclear what the object is exactly. The film creates a visual correspondence between the flesh and hair of Izzi and the flesh and fibers of the tree.

Izzi's body is made holy through the symbolism of this sacred Christian object. When her body is later linked to the Treeship's bark, and the space-traveling Tom consumes the bark of the tree like a sacred sacrament, we see Izzi's body recast as holy (like the body of Christ in the Eucharist). This visual equivalency illustrates transcendence of the limitations of her physical form through her adoption of the perspective of death as an act of creation, but the visual correspondence which makes Izzi's flesh appear divine recreates the myth of Europeans being perceived as gods by natives. The first monstrance contains a lock of hair of Queen Isabel, and the second monstrance contains what looks like gold.

Because of the position of the monstrance, the figure in the kneeling position beholds it from below. This dramatic composition evokes an image of ascension. The makeshift altar is where we expect the figure to be worshipping God, but in the flashback shown, this artificially created space of worship is a space of remembrance. He uses this space to remember his queen. He uses the olfactory and tactile senses, and the shot immerses the viewer in the sensory bridges of his memory. He smells the leather and touches the golden ring within it. His olfactory sense and the tactile provocation ring spur his memory and vision of the queen at the moment she gave him that ring. The camera

adopts his gaze looking upon the monstrosity. The dramatic composition is symmetrical within the frame. Afterward, the next shot reveals the name of the film in the same manuscript (significantly, it is handwritten).

The plot of the film and Tommy's determination to heal Izzi's body from terminal cancer preoccupy the viewer with the body of Izzi and the mind of Tommy. Images were linking Izzi's body to the stars, the trees, and the earth repeatedly connect across the images of past, present, and future. The textual filter of the Book of Genesis is enforced by the visual transition from text to image. The visual transition is a reenactment of the light and darkness which usher the creation of the universe from the Book of Genesis. This creation narrative becomes superimposed over the Mayan creation narrative, and the dynamic binary between darkness and light becomes a visual motif for the rest of the film. The Book of Genesis provides the verse which prefaces the entire film, and the verses describing creation form the foundation of its entire visual schema. Also, the dialogue of the film in sixteenth-century Spain conjures the discourse of Eden, Adam, and Eve. The imagining of Tommy and Izzi as Adam and Eve reiterate the discourse of Eden, which was imposed upon America imagined as empty and destined to be inhabited.

Light represents creation out of the absence, emptiness, and death, which is symbolized by darkness. Karen Armstrong analyzes the rhythm and repeated motifs present in the beginning verses and points to how each verb creates a "stately rhythm and repetition" to create "a serenely ordained pattern" (9). The verses themselves serve as a pattern in both the composition of the film and the graphic novel. Armstrong writes:

God has simply to speak and his words articulate the formless waste of chaos, giving it grammar, shape and form: Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there

was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Genesis I: 3-5)<sup>26</sup>

The entire journey of the *conquistador* through the jungle is shrouded in darkness. The leaves and skeletons which punctuate his path through the horde of Mayan warriors are shrouded in darkness. Like a moth to a flame, the man we follow is continually moving towards the light above-seeking order out of chaos. The stars served as lights in the sky to guide the priest to the location of the pyramid itself. The ultimate destination of these men is to reach the light no matter what. Armstrong's interpretation of the verses from Genesis shows how the imagery of the verses emphasizes separation.

The repeated motif of separation--of light from darkness, sea from dry land, day from night—shows that this is a world where boundaries are important. Plants, animals, and fish are all classified according to their species. Everything must keep to the place allotted to it and must not transgress its limits. (Armstrong 10)

Later on, Armstrong focuses on the theme of separation when she discusses an interpretation of the story of Adam, Eve, and Eden. Her interpretation focuses on the gap between the divine and the mundane—separation from God. The opposite of separation—a search of unity is the theme which most clearly stands out for Skorin-Kapov.

This thematic of separation is also incorporated in the visual thematic of the film. Armstrong is not concerned with the notion of original sin, but rather with the first separation, which she interprets as gradually taking place before Adam and Eve fall from Eden. Her interpretation echoes themes discussed by Skorin-Kapov as well.

Human beings, it was said, were in complete harmony with their environment, with one another, and with the divine. There was no sickness, no death, no

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<sup>26</sup> (Armstrong 9)

discord. The myth represents a near-universal conviction that life was not meant to be so painful and fragmented. Much of the religious quest has been an attempt to recover this lost wholeness and integration. They regard it as a nostalgia for our prenatal existence in the womb or for our mother's breast. [The] account of the Garden of Eden clearly resembles this yearning for paradise and a lost harmony. (Armstrong 22)

The presentation of each article or artifact of knowledge differs, and the Christian artifact is not seen side by side with the non-Christian artifact. The Book of Genesis prefaces and serves as a filter and guide for the Mayan Codices. The latter is presented at the beginning of the entire film and thus receives precedence. It is an epigraph for the beginning of Izzi's manuscript. The Book of Genesis prefaces the image of First Father sacrificing himself for the creation of the world. In contrast, the Mayan codex does not appear from the very beginning of the film. The Mayan Codex is perceived in the epistemic framing of the Biblical framework of knowledge in the epigraph and the fiction of Izzi's text. Rather than receiving the text in silence, the codex is facilitated in the voice and explanation of Izzi as she and Tom peer at the museum glass display cases. How would it have been different? How would it have been if we had started the film with an image of the codex? In comparison, the visual sources of Mayan codices on display within the museum are framed by the beginning Biblical verse and later, Izzi's written and oral narratives.

The scene in the museum is a significant example of the power hierarchy in cultural forms and distance within the film. Even when the cultural production is Mayan, Izzi is the sole interpreter in both textual knowledge and orality. All the spaces inhabited by Mayan figures and cultural forms are far off, imaginary, or distant in some form in

time and space. The fragment of bark extracted, transported, and transplanted is another image of Tommy gazing upon and manipulating bodies to cure and transform them. The Mayan warriors only occupy the imagination of Izzi's manuscript. The words of the Mayan guide only reach us through time and distance in the voice of Izzi. Lastly, the codices in the museum are frozen in time and relegated to ancient history. The exhibition where the film depicts them is shrouded in darkness except for the spotlights on the pages Izzi narrates. Only her voice brings them out.

Both scenes incorporate an image of a Mayan pyramid. First, when Tommy returns home, there is the same Mayan pyramid in the beginning sequence in a painting that hangs in the household—a visual *mise en abyme* (Figure 17). Both the painting and exhibitions are spaces where Tommy searches for Izzi. In the museum, he ascends the stairs to the entry display as a structural echo of the Mayan pyramid from the beginning scene of Tomas in New Spain. Both the painting and the museum exhibition create visual echoes across timelines. The *conquistador* of Izzi's narrative and Tommy are always guided by lighted passages to move towards Izzi. The temple and the codices of the museum become sacred texts, and spaces subsumed to Tommy's quest.

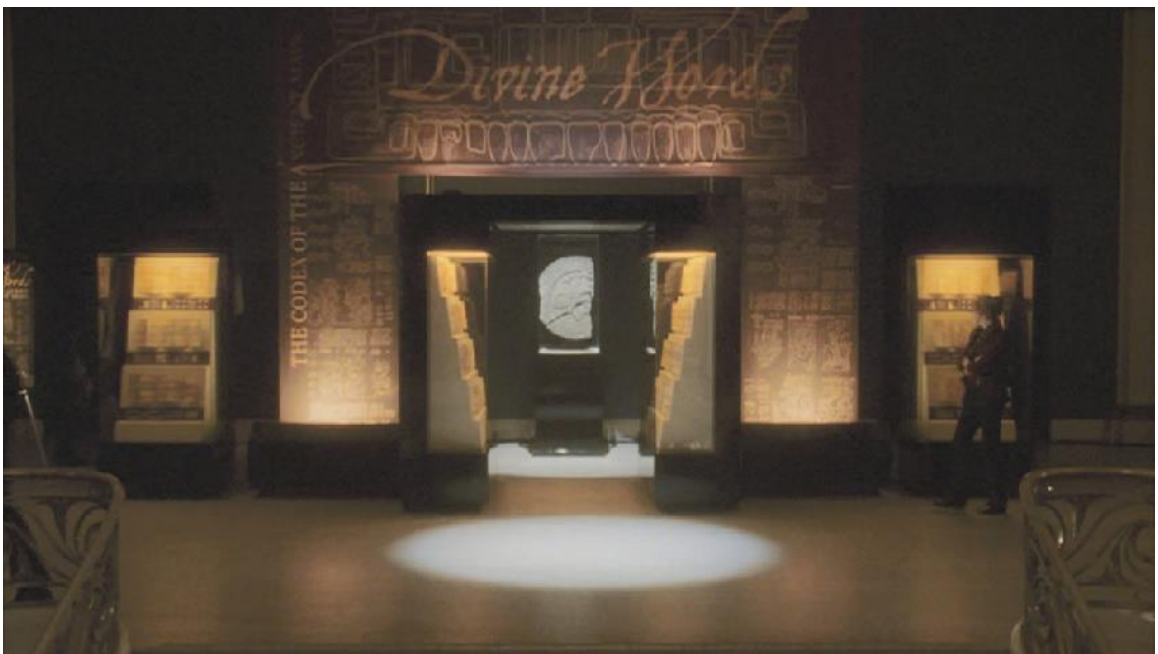
The spatial representation of each text is significant as it also demonstrates how dominant systems interpreted the systems of peoples, lands, and cultures they were occupying. The illumination of the Book of Genesis without a defined or contained space creates the impression of infinity within a *mise en abyme* as the verse creates the foundation for layers of mirrored images within the film. It occupies our entire gaze



within the screen to seem universal and timeless, floating, and forever present in our minds from the beginning of the film.



**Figure 17** The painting of in Izzi and Tommy's house (*The Fountain*, 2006)



**Figure 18** The Museum Exhibition of Mayan Codices (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The film does not problematize the fact that the four Codices on display within the museum exhibition are all that survived the destructive policy of Diego de Landa. The exhibition sign in the film lists the codices: The Dresden Codex, The Madrid Codex, the Grolier Codex, the Paris Codex. In the shot showing Izzi's writing the epigraph, the locus of enunciation is entirely invisible when we see the hand of Izzi writing the Book of Genesis. In contrast, the Codices in the museum space become solely associated with the past. In the second half of his work, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire describes the cultures and civilizations put on display as *mutilated* and *dead*<sup>27</sup>.

Non-Christian cultures and bodies presented only exist in faraway spaces and times within the imagination and mediation of Izzi. The spatial and temporal distance in the representation of cultural production from Mayan sources creates the hierarchy of knowledge where Mayan knowledge appears filtered through non-Mayan perspectives and voices. The past itself is an exotic, distant fantasy, and the medieval quest imagery of a knight and his lady is a romanticized echo of familiar imagery of chivalric romance.

The combination of linear and circular time presented in the film is never a space of agency for the darker figures who wear the garb of imperial Iberia's Others. Izzi and Tom participate in the circular model as they span all spaces and moments, and reiterate specific moments in repeated frames. In contrast, the historicized figures of the shaman, the Moorish soldier, and the Mayans exist solely as aides and auxiliaries to the *conquistador*. Father Avila and the Inquisitor also remain in the past-but they still possess power and agency for reading and interpreting textual and visual sources of knowledge.

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<sup>27</sup>Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. (*Discours sur le colonialisme, Engl.*) New York: Monthly Review Pr., 1972. Print.

The different types of Mayans seen in the film are all agents of transformation or obstacles to be struck down, elements of the scenery. The Mayan warriors and Shaman are only living in the fantastical past within the film. The present version we see and hear of contemporary Mayan voices is still silent, distant, or absent. The first case is the Mayan codices on display in the museum exhibition. The second case is the secondhand oral account of Izzi when she communicates what the Mayan guide said about his father.

These static and distant sources of Mayan voices and cultures are also the sources from which Izzi and Tom derive their narratives for transformation through death and the “road to awe” (*The Fountain*, 2006). The telescope and the museum Izzi show to Tom forms the foundation of his imagination and consciousness as he reads her manuscript. The museum exhibition is the display of Mayan images that, extracted and implanted, create his conception of Xibalba and First Father. Izzi and Tommy’s relation to the knowledge of Mayan cosmology mirrors the relation of the Orient to the Orientalist, and the peripheral representations of the Mayan actors and narrators mirror the nineteenth-century tradition of containing, displaying and interpreting bodies and voices of the persons studied.

The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he *could be there*, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient’s part. Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character. Additionally, the imaginative

examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.<sup>28</sup>

Tommy's body in the reimagined forms becomes the embodiment of First Father in the Mayan narrative of creation, which Izzi narrates in the museum. The imagery of a Mayan God is projected onto Tommy's body so that he changes his conception of mortality and death. This visual transformation of Tommy's body onto the body of a Mayan god figure in creation is a problematic reproduction of the myth that Amerindians saw Europeans as divine figures. When the Mayan priest kneels before the *conquistador*, this scene and its composition is the most potent visual reinforcement of the mythology of conquest, which was spread by multiple generations of translators and historiographers following Christopher Columbus.

The Mayan priest bows to Tomas/Tom as an embodiment of the Mayan First Father (Figure 19). The apotheosis of Tommy's imagined forms is apparent both in the journey, as well as the destination. The journey of Tommy/Tom/Tomas is always characterized as movement from darkness to light. Both the set design and the cinematography echo the fact that Izzi's text is the foundational narrative for Tom's imagination—the guiding light. Her written text and her orality form the guiding lights on his dark path of denial towards acceptance of her death. To help him reimagine her death, she pulls new images from a tradition that is foreign to him and his imagination. While he strives to heal his wife and her physical body, she aims to heal him and his immaterial

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<sup>28</sup>Said, 7-8.

being through the stories and images she has appropriated. Izzi narrates the story of the World Tree image to Tommy in the Museum. Every moment in the film is led by Izzi's spoken and written narrative like Ariadne's thread, and her iteration of Mayan cosmology marks the final destination of each configuration of Tommy as well.



**Figure 19** The Mayan priest bows to the Tomas/Tom as First Father (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The final destination of future Tom and the *conquistador* Tomas is preconditioned by Izzi's narration of the museum exhibition, and the images of the Mayan codex and Mayan archeological texts become imprinted on the bodies of Tom and Tomas. Like Izzi, Aronofsky and Ari Handel wrote the narrative of First Father based on research.<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>29</sup>Dr. Karl Taube at UCR looked at the graphic novel of *The Fountain* and recognized the narrative of First Father from Linda Schele's work. She was a renowned expert in Maya archaeology dealing with Maya iconography and epigraphy. The dominant imagery of death, sacrifice and resurrection that correspond to the images of the journey through the dark into the light, the ascension from Earth into the sky that appear in Aronofsky's film

filmic narrative of First Father, or Hun-Hunahpu, in Mayan mythology takes from the work of Linda Schele. The image Izzi shows Tommy in the exhibit of “Divine Words” displaying Mayan Codices is a visual replication of the final shot of Tom’s body disintegrating from the death of Xibalba and thus, regenerating the tree within the orb:

...the great image of Pakal’s sarcophagus at Palenque [as it] shows [First Father] falling down the World Tree into the Maw of the Earth. The expression the ancient Maya used for this fall was ochbih, “he entered the road” The road was the Milky Way, which is called both the Sak Be (White Road) and the Xibal Be (Road to Awe) by the Maya. Pakal enters this road in death.<sup>30</sup>

Every image of Tommy, Tom, and Tomas moving across space is planned by the set designer, James Chinlund, as a lighted passageway. The first dark passageway Tomas enters after he ascends the pyramid was initially planned to evoke the image of a birth canal. Every darkened path dotted with lights mirrors the Milky Way or White Road described in Schele’s work. It is Tommy who reenacts this road to death through the manuscript and imagination of Izzi. In the climax of the *conquistador*’s journey to the top of the pyramid, he drinks from the tree of life and looks up to see the light of the nebula, and then he *falls* the same way First Father falls down the World Tree. This fall is foreshadowed by Izzi when she looks up toward the light in the museum and then falls during her seizure. That is the beginning of her road in death. After her fall, Izzi describes

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are all built on a very specific narrative of Mayan mythology as narrated by the late scholar Linda Schele in her work, *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand years on the Shaman’s Path*. The entire narration of the Mayan first father as it is narrated according to the research of Izzi is taken from the work of the late Linda Schele, who was a well-known pioneer in the work of Mayan Archaeology and Culture. In her text, Schele herself recognizes the limitations and problems of the perspectives she asserts in this book but it is all meant to contribute to an increasing and evolving understanding, or the desire to understand the worldview of the Maya who for Schele, do not solely exist in the past.

<sup>30</sup>Freidel, David A., et al. *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman’s Path*. William Morrow and Company, 1993. Print. P 77.

the “road to awe” to Tommy in the hospital bed as she feels ready for death within this epistemic framework she has learned through her research and created through writing.



**Figure 20** The image of First Father and The World Tree (*The Fountain*, 2006)

This representation of the death, rebirth, and sacrifice of First Father becomes reiterated in Izzi’s manuscript of future Tom, and past Tomas both mirror the posture in their body with the image of First Father falling down the World Tree. They look up towards the light, and they fall in the same form as First Father in the image of his sacrifice. The film comes full circle from the epistemic filter Izzi has created. Izzi leaves the pages of the last chapter of her manuscript blank but, because Izzi teaches Tommy the narrative of First Father, the World Tree, and the road to death when she is stargazing on the roof, walking through the museum exhibition, and in the hospital bed, he finally learns how to finish the story.





**Figure 21** Tomas's body forming earth like First Father (*The Fountain*, 2006)



**Figure 22** Tom's body mirroring the sacrifice of First Father (*The Fountain*, 2006)



Tommy is finally able to see the end as another beginning, death as creation. Tommy has imagined the ending to the manuscript when the Mayan priest sees Tomas the *conquistador* in the form of Tom, the space traveler because Tomas and Tom both mirror the sacrifice of First Father, which Izzi describes to Tommy. In the celestial realm of the future timeline, Tom reaches Xibalba, and the star explodes.

Tom's body adopts the same posture as First Father in the Codex, and the dying Treeship regenerates. In the terrestrial realm, Tomas looks up and sees the light above after he drinks the sap from the tree. He falls, and flowers and green leaves begin to erupt and protrude from his body. In the graphic novel, the *conquistador's* full name is Tomas Verde. His flesh is transformed into this eponymous allusion to the color green—*green* leaves and stems with white flowers blossom shoot out from his flesh till his whole body is a sea of green earth.

## **Visual Technologies**

Tom and Izzi both control visual technology in the film, and they have the sole agency to view and extract from the knowledge, text, lands, and bodies of the Other. In the timeline of the present, Tommy spends long hours in front of computer screens, hunched over microscopes, over an operating table, and staring at X-rays as he is testing experimental compounds to test and try to reduce tumor growth. In the timeline of the past, Tomas gazes upon New Spain (colonial Yucatán) on a map. The map is superimposed by light and shadow to project the carvings of a ceremonial blade onto the

paper of the map. The visual technologies create frameworks that imitate an imperial gaze. The acts of writing, reading, and interpretation rest solely in the dominion of the European, Christian, Western voices as they gaze upon bodies of texts, lands (maps), flora, constellations, and non-European, non-Christian, non-White bodies.



**Figure 23** Dr. Tommy Creo and Donovan's X-rays (*The Fountain*, 2006)

Visual technologies orient the viewer within an imperial gaze and result in the perpetuation of the mythology and narratives which characterize the domination of non-European, non-Christian, non-White bodies of people, bodies of land and bodies of knowledge for colonial expansion. The most dominant imagery stems from various forms of visual technology pictured within the film. Every piece is possessed, used, and interpreted by Tom and Izzi, but the presence of multiple forms of visual technology - each utilized with a specific purpose echoes the visual aspect of the privileging of

eurocentric vision on the bodies of conquered territories, peoples and cultures. Tommy and Izzi control and utilize multiple visual technologies in the film: X-ray, a telescope, a microscope, and a visually projected map. Every map, manuscript, and codex always appear within an interplay between darkness and light. After the surgery, the light of the X-ray shows the success of the tree compound in treating the test subject.

Dr. Tommy Creo looks down upon the microscopically manipulated cellular interactions through his microscope while Izzi Creo looks up at the celestial bodies and their movements through her telescope. Dr. Tommy Creo uses light to see through flesh with X-rays of the experimental primate's brain tissue while Queen Isabel and Captain Tom Verde behold a map that requires the light to shine through a blade and project onto a different type of body, a body of land.



**Figure 24** Tommy analyzing the ethnobotanical compound under a microscope  
(*The Fountain*, 2006)

In addition to the visual technologies shown *within* the film, the film itself is a visual technology that also communicates a particular image and interpretation. The camera used to film is a technology that uses the interplay of light and darkness to create and display a specific image without drawing attention to the production and limitations of that imagery. The interplay of luminosity and darkness exists in all of the visual technology utilized. The visual binary of light and darkness used in each piece of visual technology parallels the binaries of cure/disease, salvation/loss, and life/death. Light and darkness also designate the movement of Tommy. Every avatar of Tommy is a figure shrouded in darkness, moving towards the light.

The camera and scene composition also create a specific point of view. To translate Walter Mignolo's concept of the *locus of enunciation* across an audiovisual text, we have to consider the point of view of the film in its physical, cultural, and psychological aspects.<sup>31</sup> The first sequence in the film shows a writer unseen writing the verse from the Book of Genesis. After that sequence, the entire film completely inhabits the subjectivity of Tom.<sup>32</sup> After seeing the words on the page, there is never a moment when the audience does not see what Tom sees or follow Tom where he goes. The audience follows Tom as he finds Izzi at the museum exhibition, and finally, it is only through Tom that the audience experiences Izzi's manuscript about Xibalba and her *conquistador*. The physical proximity of the camera to Rachel Weisz, to Izzi's flesh and her face, communicates the intimacy of Tom's bond with his wife, all he sees is her. Her

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<sup>31</sup>Corrigan, Timothy. *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*. Boston: Pearson, 2012. Print. P 43.

<sup>32</sup>(Corrigan, 44)

face occupies the entire screen because Izzi occupies Tom's mind and imagination. Every moment and shift in time and space is linked to Tom returning to a moment with Izzi.

The page at the beginning is shrouded in darkness until illuminated. This movement from darkness to light represents Tom's psychological dilemma and transformation. Darkness represents the fear of death and loss. Death is the enemy to be defeated in the mind of Dr. Tom Creo. Death, disease, and the lack of a cure, the lack of a cure to Izzi's condition, are represented in darkness. Cancer that is killing his wife and every form of visual technology shown within the film serves to show a path to navigate the darkness with light.

The film starts in darkness and ends in light. Dr. Tom says to Burstyn's character, "Death is a disease." so he wants to cure it. In the scene of Izzi's funeral, the setting is a snowy field overtaken with the white landscape and brightness. The light at the end of the film starkly contrasts the darkness of the first scene, but along the journey of Izzi's death and Tom's acceptance, all the darker figures which appear in their imaginations and fictions remain in the darkness.

The film mirrors the images the characters see when they look up and look down. The special effects team macro-photography because though they could not know what a nebula wrapped around a dying star would look like, the macro-photography of Peter Parks allowed them to create that imagery using the same laws of physics which apply under a microscope and in outer space.<sup>33</sup> Even when Tom looks down at the manuscript and down at the microscope, it only serves him in the theme of ascension. The constant

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<sup>33</sup>(*The Fountain*, 2006)

image of ascension mirrors the vertical nature of Biblical imagery of the *fall* of Adam and Eve from Eden. The constant desire for *ascension* conveyed in the images of going up the pyramid, looking up at the skylight of the hospital, looking up through a telescope, Izzi looking up at the light in the Museum, Captain Tom climbing up the tree and his ship ascending towards Xibalba. Tommy is always moving towards the light, which often contains Izzi, her symbolic embodiment, or the means to save Izzi from disease, darkness, or death.

Tommy sees the cure with the light of the microscope. In the film, the brightness seen as Dr. Tom peers down the lens of the microscope echoes in the brightness of the star above. Under the microscope, Tommy looks at the ethnobotanical compound, which was extracted from a tree in Guatemala. While Izzi gazes through her telescope, Tom peers into his microscope at biological samples extracted from a tree in the rainforest. Tommy extracts biological samples (from a Guatemalan jungle), isolates proteins and cells to combine and test them under the microscope before finally grafting them into the body of the research subject. The intent of healing motivates both the activities of Izzi as well as Tommy, but the image of healing appears allegorically through romanticized imagery of conquest, which is never questioned or critiqued. All the bodies of animals (chimp in the lab), plants (tree in the jungle), people (Mayans in the forest), celestial bodies (the star Xibalba regenerates the tree) and territories (the Yucatán and the unnamed temple in the jungle) end up coinciding with Izzi's and Tommy's quests.

The transition from darkness to light translates into Dr. Tom Creo's *scientific* discovery (when he uses tree bark) and *spiritual* discovery of Self through the imagined

Other (when he uses the codex). Lastly, the immaterial interpretation, extraction, and transplantation of Mayan cultural knowledge are parallel to the physical extraction and transplantation of the tree fragment. The film leaves the origin of the tree fragment opaque and vague, thus linking it to the exotic and miraculous associations pinned upon the portrait of the Yucatán region, its jungle landscape, and its Mayan pyramids.

Tom and Izzi are the sole possessors of the visual technologies seen within the film. Even though the sword is of Mayan origin within the story, it is taken by a Franciscan monk and then interpreted by the figures of a Spanish queen. Tom and Izzi, in their multiple incarnations, always subject observing objects. Like the drawings projected through the light beaming upon natives of Guatemala also become objects to be observed. The difference between the Shaman and the Inquisitor also becomes apparent with the asymmetry of their comparison. A Mayan priest is an object foreseen in verse from Genesis. His body and words are already metaphorically mapped out for the viewer in the verse from the Book of Genesis. He is mapped out in textuality, while the Inquisitor is another possessor of a map.

### **Mapping Bodies Across Time**

Three different maps appear within the fiction of Izzi's manuscript. First, the viewer sees the Inquisitor Silecio peering over a map of Spain. Secondly, Queen Isabel uses a map of New Spain to show Captain Tomas how to get to the Tree of Life. Lastly, the men on the expedition in New Spain begin to stir a mutiny and peer over a shadowy

map because they believe they are travelling in circles. The first two of these maps echo the visual control and Apollonian perspective of the imperial gaze.

The colonial map vividly embodies the contradictions of colonial discourse. Map-making became the servant of colonial plunder, for the knowledge constituted by the map both preceded and legitimized the conquest of territory. The map is a technology of knowledge that professes to capture the truth about a place in pure, scientific form, operating under the guise of scientific exactitude and promising to retrieve and reproduce nature exactly as it is. As such, it is also a technology of possession, promising that those with the capacity to make such perfect representations must also have the right of territorial control.<sup>34</sup>

The map of Spain symbolizes cancer in Izzi's body while the map of New Spain represents the cure. In the words of Queen Isabel: "Salvation lies in the jungles of New Spain."<sup>35</sup> Izzi is Queen Isabel. Queen Isabel is Spain. When Queen Isabel asks the *conquistador* if he will deliver Spain from bondage, she is referring to the metaphorical linking of the body of the Queen to the body of Spain (repeating a trope of feminine bodies being the conquered territories). The map of Spain represents Izzi's body being overtaken by the spreading dominion of the Inquisition, which symbolizes cancer. Silecio's self-mutilation of his body parallels the cancerous cells of Izzi's tumor. The first map which shows bodies in darkness and light is the map of Spain. The Grand Inquisitor Silecio gazes upon the bloody stain on the map as the scene transitions into the darkness to look like a starry night sky. The parallel between the body of the Queen (Izzi) and the body of land (Spain) is carried forth despite anachronistic use of the name of Spain when the figure of Queen Isabel of Castile represented one of many kingdoms which collectively now make up what is known as Spain. The Grand Inquisitor looms

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<sup>34</sup>McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print. Pp. 28-29.

<sup>35</sup> (*The Fountain*, 2006)



over the bleeding map of Spain. The composition of the scene reinforces the opposition between light and darkness, and death and disease. The map itself mirrors the other visual technologies in the film because the Grand Inquisitor is looking upon the body of Spain. Spain on the map symbolizes Queen Isabella, which represents the body of Izzi.

Izzi is the map, Izzi is Spain. The spreading dominion slowly overtakes the map of Spain lorded over by a Grand Inquisitor. Among all the reimagined images, the moment which precedes this red map is especially compelling in its specific rhetorical and visual recalling of the Spanish Inquisition. Continually returning to a discourse of corporality, the Inquisition is the villain and symbolic cancer overtaking the body of Spain, a metaphor for the body of the Queen herself, the self-projection of Izzi. As the self-projection of Izzi, the textual embodiment of her role in the narrative she has written, the Queen is also a writing figure.



**Figure 25** The map of Spain marked by blood under Silecio (*The Fountain*, 2006)

This map represents Dr. Tommy Creo's conflict: the cancer is spreading. The Inquisitor spreads his bloody reign, symbolically, in a stain of blood upon the map of Spain. The two circular buckets in each corner of the map represent the contest between light and darkness. In the top left corner, we see the candles. The candles as a source of light are gathered together in one place because they directly contrast the bucket of blood on the other side of the map. On the bottom right corner, the bucket of blood looks black, in complete contrast to the candlelight. The blood is red as the Grand Inquisitor spreads it upon the paper and speaks the lines, "Queen of nothing but her sins" (*The Fountain*, 2006).

The map is the *conquistador*'s motivation for seeking out the Tree of Life: the Grand Inquisitor is slowly spreading his control over Spain, and his Queen is in peril. This bloodstain, *mancha desangre* seen upon the paper, conjures dark associations with the notion of blood purity, *limpieza de sangre*, after the scenes of torture by the Inquisition. Despite the portrayal of the Inquisitor as a cancerous villain, evoking images of torture and politically motivated violence under the guise of religious authority by the Spanish Inquisition reinforces the Black Legend and offers no acknowledgment or dignity to the historical victims of that violence.

The hanging figures become props in the fantasy of this villainous Inquisitor's political choke of the Queen's territory. Reinscribing the dehumanization of those bodies which appear mangled and muted is extremely problematic. Truly, the scene would have been entirely different if the hanging bodies had not been incorporated. The hanging bodies make the Inquisitor seem cannibalistic. The film appropriates the link between the

Inquisition and the body of Spain to equate the Inquisition suffered by the imagined Queen Isabel with the cancerous tumor suffered by Izzi. The *conquistador* is trying to cure the Queen of the Inquisition.

Aronofsky incorporates three metaphors within one image. Firstly, the body of Izzi reimagined as Queen Isabel is communicated in metaphor as the body of Spain. The Inquisitor effaces the map with his blood to symbolize land taken away from the queen. The area he marks is the historical kingdom of Granada; his gesture echoes the end of the Reconquest, but the Inquisitor's expanding control symbolizes cancer in Izzi's body.

The imagery is both ahistorical and also anachronistic as Spain, as we know it today, did not truly exist when Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon married and united, through marriage, two of the major kingdoms which became the most powerful alliance against the Muslim *taifas* (principalities). Secondly, the map shows a configuration which evokes the moment in 1492 when Granada was the last remaining Muslim sovereignty on the peninsula, but Aronofsky's narrative shows it as the last stronghold of Queen Isabel in her struggle to survive the enclosing power of the Inquisition.

No historical entity or figure follows suit with any historiographical truth, but the essence echoed in the historical ornamentation is an array of stock images of a queen and a *conquistador*. The film's omission and contortion of the historical details regarding Queen Isabel, the conquest of Granada, and the Spanish Inquisition result in a double erasure as Aronofsky layers one grand narrative of romance atop another grand narrative of conquest.

Within this imagery, Spain is also an exotic distortion of historical reality. As Barbara Fuchs mentions, Spain's history with Muslim, Amazigh and Arab presence in the peninsula involved intimacy and habitual familiarity, which created hybridity in the cultures, the peoples and the spaces they shared; Spain was "orientalized" through propaganda by other European, predominantly Protestant, nations as Spain was Catholic imperial power after 1492.<sup>36</sup> Catholic Spain becomes "orientalized" through both its Catholic and Moorish associations evoked in the spatial imagination of the film.

The bloodstained map evokes a metaphor of disease, darkness and ignorance represented in the figure of Silecio looming above the body of Spain. Silecio marks blood upon the map of Spain with his hand to show his increasing control over the territory of the Queen. This action is an eerie evocation. The stain of blood summons the historical *limpieza de sangre*, blood purity, which was used as a genealogical marker of difference for Moriscos and Conversos (former Muslims and Jews) even after they converted to Christianity. In the film, the Grand Inquisitor's blood on the map symbolizes the demise of Queen Isabel, as it parallels cancer in Izzi's body.

The last metaphor communicated in the image of the map is the body among stars. The placement of candles surrounding the map as the camera gazes down upon it makes it look like a body among stars when the light dims out. The map of Spain represents the body of the Queen, the image of a tree carved into the ornamental doorway in the Moorish palace overlays the profile of the queen's body. The Queen is writing as her body is half-hidden in the intricate doorway image of a tree.

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<sup>36</sup>Fuchs, Barbara. *Exotic Nation: Maurophilia and the Construction of Early Modern Spain*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2009. Print. P. 3.



**Figure 26** Queen Isabel's frame superimposed by image of a tree (*The Fountain*, 2006)

It is the image of how through her writing, Izzi will reframe her death as creation. The doorway is also symbolic as a portal. Izzi is preparing herself to pass from one world to another form. The space traveler Tom speaks to the tree, in the same manner, Tommy whispers to Izzi. Tom is trying to save the body of the tree the same way Tommy is trying to save Izzi. Lastly, doctor Tom Creo uses a compound from a tree, and in the photograph of that tree mirrors the tree in Tom's Treeship. After finding this compound, he is unable to save his wife, but he plants a tree on her grave and, in that way, unites her body with the tree, which we imagine will grow upon that site in the future. The film creates constant visual parallels between Izzi's body and the body of the tree to empower the narrative Izzi creates for herself and Tommy. The visual linking of Izzi as a tree foreshadows Tommy planting a seed at the end of the film. As the seed planted, she will live on in the tree planted on her grave.

There are four sets of celestial and terrestrial bodies the audience sees mapped out through visual technology. First, there is the constant image of mapping the stars when we first see Izzi identifying the location of Xibalba with her telescope. The constellation repeats throughout multiple scenic compositions. Every darkened path showing Tommy/Tomas/Tom guided by sources of light such as torches, lamps, or stars in space echoes a movement towards that first constellation Izzi shows Tomas in the telescope in the timeline of the present. The film romanticizes medieval spiritual geographies, which mixed myth, religion, and world mapping. The maps in the film echo Mignolo's differentiation of the geometric center and the ethnocentric center.

Imaginary constructions take on, over time, ontological dimensions; descriptions of an object become the object itself. The Christian partition of the world into three units, according to the mental frame of their sacred narrative as described in the T/O maps, was indeed a Christian invention and not a natural division of the earth supposedly known and accepted in different cultures. Ibn Khaldun drew a geopolitical map and wrote a political-economic history of the world from the Arab perspective. What Idrisi's map and Ibn Khaldun's comments teach us is precisely that maps are and are not the territory. They are not, because they do not reflect any essential reality of the shape of the earth or of the powerful tool for controlling territories, colonizing the mind and imposing themselves on the members of the community using the map as the real territory.<sup>37</sup>

In the symbolic discourse which represents the pathology and the cure of Izzi's body, the film reinforces a colonial practice of reinterpreting sacred and geographic centers in colonized spaces, which included imposing European models for the organization and conception of space. Space was another metaphorical body which was interpreted through a colonial vision:

...the basic matrix, similar to that of ancient Mesoamerica and ancient China, shows that they enter as the navel of the world (when the body is used as model or

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<sup>37</sup>Mignolo, 237.

metaphor) or as the *axis mundi*, (when a temple, a city, or a mountain is used as model or metaphor) is common to apparently unrelated cosmologies. The tripartite, instead of the quadripartite, division of T/O maps in Christian cosmologies responds to the same ethnic logic in the rationalization of space. The magic number three, instead of four, was related to the Christian narrative of the origin of the world and the post facto division of the earth based on the magic number three of the sacred Trinity and Noah's three sons. For all these reasons, it certainly would be an inaccurate and unfair evolutionary judgment to state that pre-Columbian cultures discovered the power of the center after they met Christian cosmology. It would be more accurate to say that Christian cosmology was built in an ethnic rationalization of the cosmos and of the earth that was complemented by the Ptolemaic cartographic projections during the religious and economic expansion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>38</sup>

Izzi's quest to help her husband is the foundation of the entire narrative of the film and its imagery. Izzi creates a fictional narrative for her husband, for her *conquistador*, as she calls him, to help him reimagine her death, and thereby to help him accept his mortality as well as his separation from Izzi. Izzi has the power to heal her husband by reshaping his imagination within her manuscript. Though past, past, and future is a common division of time, the circular tryptic of time which Izzi and Tommy occupy play out as dominant mobility and imagination of the Western Self in Three different centers at once. The Christian narrative characterized by three dominates over four.<sup>39</sup> Tom exists in three avatars. The pyramids are three which locate the center, the navel. Also, the rule of three applies to the film's division of past, present, and future.

Mignolo's examples show how Guaman Poma de Ayala's colonial models provided alternative centers, orientations, and divisions to Western cosmographies and

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<sup>38</sup> (Mignolo 251-252)

<sup>39</sup>(Mignolo 249)

showed “the coalescence of two worlds”.<sup>40</sup> The Inca conceived space and time as *Tahuantinsuyu*, “the land of the four parts,” and Cuzco was the center. Garcilaso de la Vega calls Cuzco, “the navel of the world”. Mignolo cites Wayne Elzey and mentions how Huitzilopochtli ordered the Aztec kingdom of Tenochtitlan to be modeled after the cosmos in four directions with the temple devoted to the Huitzilopochtli at the center.<sup>41</sup>

This blade is problematic because it is an object linked to the indigenous perspective of space, yet the object is used to mimic an imperial gaze. The blade was taken from the corpse of a Mayan priest. In the scene, the blade becomes a blend of a treasure map, a divine relic, and an ancient artifact. The blade projects shadow upon the image of Mayan sites across the landscape of the Yucatán in which it was found, and yet both objects are incongruous. The blade is being projected onto a map that could have only been produced after the conquest since Tikal and all the other names of these Mayan sites are written with the Latin alphabet. The usage of the map in the film evokes a link between Iberian imperialism and the quest for salvation, and for an earthly Eden, but an indigenous object is being read with foreign texts and maps. Lastly, the map of New Spain pays no mind to the indigenous populations and their sovereignty. It appears as a blank space, and absence to receive the Edenic desires and Biblical prophecy of Queen Isabel and Father Avila.

Tommy’s mobility is in direct contrast to the motionlessness of the darker bodies which surround him. The Mayan Shaman, the Warriors, the Moorish soldier are all contained to limited, imagined time and space. The Inquisitor and the Franciscan friar are

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<sup>40</sup>(Mignolo 251-254)

<sup>41</sup>(Mignolo, 249)



also confined, but they have speaking and interpreting abilities and are the sources of the two maps in the film. They each preside over the two maps shown within the film.

The film starts in darkness and ends in light. The Book of Genesis forms the epistemic framing for Queen Isabel in this scene, showing the link between text and vision in the imperial gaze, epistemically filtering all the knowledge Izzi and Queen Isabel communicate during the entire film. The film is another visual technology predetermined by a filter of knowledge. *The Fountain* feeds off of this aura of discovery, but the search for the tree of life is based on an epistemic filter that predetermines the nature of “discovery.” The map no longer represents the land and people, and rather it is subsumed by the European gaze—the gaze and desire of the monarch, the *conquistador*, and the priest upon foreign bodies. Meanwhile, the Moorish ally stands as a silent witness and does not speak any interpretation of his own. Aronofsky’s film is fantasy, but the erasure of indigenous meanings upon silenced bodies is a repeated trope of *colonial semiotics* because only Father Avila and Queen Isabel interpret the blade and body of land according to their knowledge system.

Both maps shown in the film depict both sides of the Iberian trans-Atlantic empire and operate with the light/dark binary. Tomas peers upon the map of New Spain. Light illuminates the path through the darkness of the jungle. When the *conquistador* seeks to cure the Queen by ridding her of the expanding reach of the Spanish Inquisition, Captain Ariel stops him by the Queen’s command. Queen Isabel instructs Tomas to seek out the Tree of Life when she shows him the map and the light projected through the sword. The

makeshift projection screen with the sword and the map is the visual technology of choice for the *conquistador*.

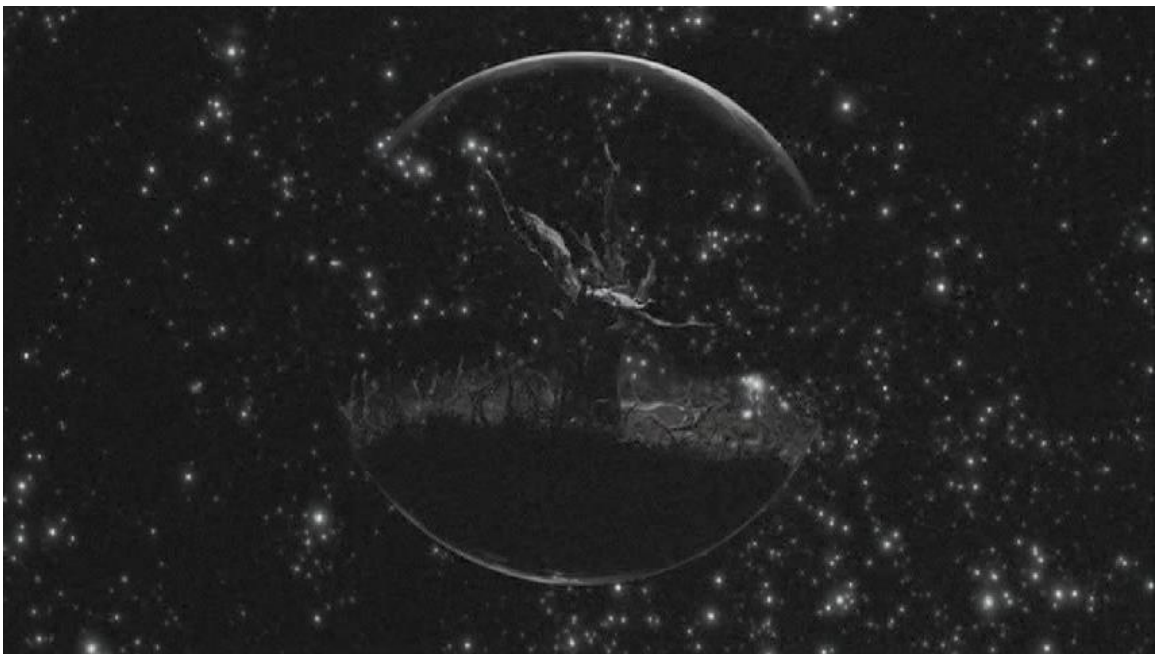


**Figure 27** Map of New Spain in light to find the Tree of Life (*The Fountain*, 2006)

Within this pathological allegory of Izzi's manuscript, the Mayan Other (land, body, knowledge, tree) forms the cure. Both maps mirror the scenes presenting biological specimens in the lab and hospital. The ink the Inquisitor smears upon the map of Spain runs red like blood, and he is cutting and bleeding the territory like a surgeon on an operating table, and yet the blood he spreads upon the white space of the map simultaneously appears more like a disease upon the body of the map rather than a cure. The map of the Yucatan connects both to the image of the microscope as well as the X-ray, as both technologies use light projected from underneath an image or biological sample in order to identify the type and the location of a disease, however, the map of Yucatán in the scene actually represents a cure, a source of salvation. This inversion of

imagery of visual technology, which recalls medical technology associated with disease/cure, is ultimately consistent in one key dimension: both maps represent bodies analyzed for extraction.

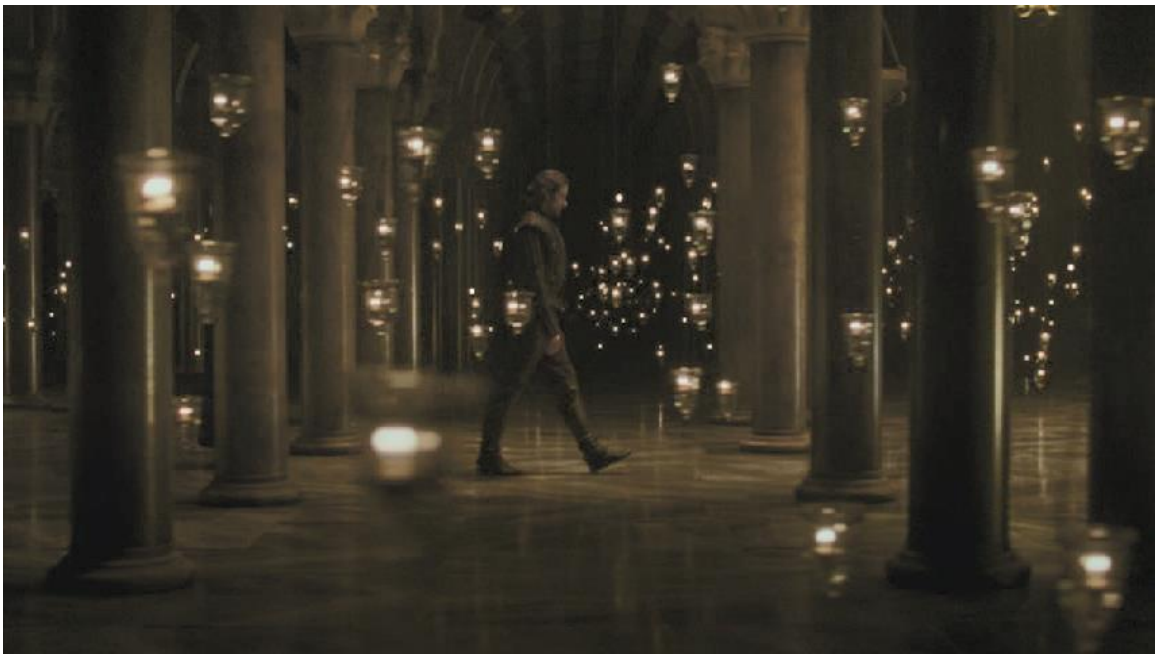
Both Izzi and Tommy look up to the stars for inspiration. Spatial navigation becomes a metaphor for spiritual knowledge and illumination. The image of the *conquistador* moving through the space of the Moorish palace foreshadows the movement of futuristic Tom through space. This equivalence drawn between earthly pursuits and heavenly ones recalls the mythology which surrounded the conquests, and it also mirrors the image of Tommy imagined as a futuristic space traveler navigating through the stars in outer space.



**Figure 28** The Treeship at the beginning of the film (*The Fountain*, 2006)

Within the film, the terrestrial pursuit mirrors the celestial pursuit. There are two imagined versions of Dr. Tommy: one is terrestrial in the form of the *conquistador*, and

the other is celestial in the form of the space traveler. Along his journey, Tommy/Tom/Tomas is guided by celestial bodies that shine brightly amidst the darkness they navigate. One scene which symbolically depicts this pursuit most clearly is when the *conquistador* walks under the hypostyle arches and pillars of the Moorish palace scattered by hanging lanterns. The figure of the *conquistador* moving across the pillars within the Moorish palace and moving up the Mayan pyramid and then towards the light at the end of the tunnel are all images of spatial symbolism representing Tommy's transformation and acceptance of a completely different conception of death.



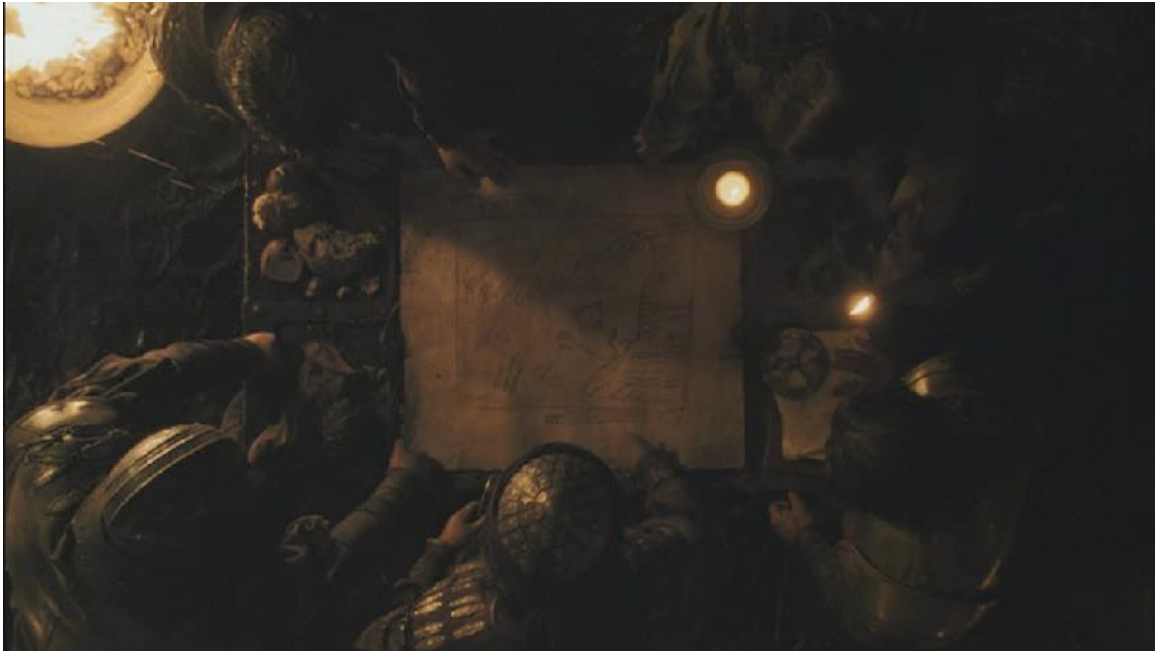
**Figure 29** Captain Tomas Verde walking towards Queen Isabel (*The Fountain*, 2006)

All three versions of Tom are constantly in motion and execute a dominion over space. The film highlights the interstellar imagery and quest narrative in the shots depicting movement and travel. The film constantly evokes starlight in the images of present and past to parallel the interstellar journey of the future Tom. Tommy in the

present and Tomas in the future walk through spaces that echo the stars and navigate through shadows. When Tommy Creo drives to the lab as soon as he receives a phone call, the streetlights illuminate his path like stars. Tom and his Treeship are in constant motion moving towards the nebula of Xibalba in space. All these scenes convey a sense of domination through spatial mobility. In contrast, the imagined figures in the fantastical spaces of coloniality are frozen in time and space. Aronofsky visited specific monuments of Spain, such as the Alcázar of Seville. The *conquistador*'s feet tread on the ground, but it looks as if he is walking among the stars, and this image evokes a sense of complete freedom, mobility, and dominion over the terrestrial and celestial spaces within this unified imagery.

Izzi and Tommy, in all their real and imaginary configurations, are the speakers and writers who possess mobility across all imagined cartographies and cosmologies imagined in the film and Izzi's text. The images of colonial Latin America and medieval Spain are appropriated first by Aronofsky within the film and then by Izzi within her manuscript. The images of maps, mosques, and bodies are displaced within a fantasy symbolizing Tommy and Izzi's respective quests and transformation. The imagery of light and darkness serves to further delineate the boundaries between the White, European Christian Self, and the Other. Tommy/Tomas/Tom and Izzi/Isabel are able to cross boundaries or barriers of time and space in the imagination. They are the only figures in motion, while all other figures serve as facilitators, guides, or benchmarks along their journey. When the darker figures like Captain Ariel peer upon a map, the map is all darkness—representing the lack of knowledge and enlightenment. Only

Tommy/Tomas can receive the knowledge which Izzi/Isabel has to give him in order to travel through the wilderness of New Spain, through the stars to Xibalba, and through the darkness of his conception of death.



**Figure 30** The map of New Spain in darkness in Captain Ariel's mutiny (*The Fountain*, 2006)

In comparison to Tommy and Izzi, who both possess the narrative agency and control within the film's reimagination of conquest, the non-European interpreters like Captain Ariel are never in possession of this Apollonian vision of control over chaos, light over darkness, life over death. In Izzi's manuscript, there is a scene of mutiny, where Captain Ariel protests because he believes the Franciscan Father Ávila is leading the expedition *in circles*. His position over the map of New Spain is completely blurred and shrouded over in shadow (Figure 30). The film visually denies him the agency to navigate the land of New Spain under any authority other than Tomas and Father Avila.

The narrative authority of Izzi and Tommy is derived from their power to transform. They alone have the ability to manipulate every text and body which falls under their gaze—to copy and paste the images and compounds needed from foreign texts and territories and inject them into the desired context. The pen of Izzi parallels the scalpel of Tom. Izzi cuts and combines Biblical verses with Mayan codices while Tom dissects and implants plant cells from a tree sample and animal tissue of a monkey on his operating table. Izzi and Tommy are the sole actors who decide what materials and forms to project to the various bodies and spaces imagined within the film and the manuscript. Their hermeneutical practices come to the forefront when they peer over a map of the Yucatán. All of the visual technologies utilize light to project or reveal an image. The map of New Spain viewed with light projected through a ceremonial Mayan bladea problematic scene. Queen Isabel provides the map and Father Avila provides the blade, which he obtained from the body of a deceased Mayan priest. Queen Isabel uses the Book of Genesis as a source of salvation and an interpretive tool. The verse from the first shot of the film is used to interpret the meaning and the truth of the light projected onto a map of the Yucatán.

Colonial situations are shaped by a process of transformation in which members of both the colonized as well as the colonizing cultures enter into a particular kind of human interaction, colonial semiosis, which, in its turn, contributes to the confirmation of the colonial situation. Territorial representations (e.g., spatial boundaries "filled" with meaning and memories) are taken here as a particular kind of colonial semiosis (e.g., mapping, naming, and silencing), namely, the confrontations of human needs and capacities to carve a space in which memories are inscribed and identities denied.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Mignolo, Walter D. "Colonial Situations, Geographical Discourses and Territorial Representations: Toward a Diatopical Understanding of Colonial Semiosis." *Dispositio*,

Three visual motifs figure here: the circular, the tripartite, and the dramatic interplay of darkness and light. A circle of light highlights every site on the map, and this image is later echoed in the film when we see space traveler Tom floating in a circle of light through the darkness of space. The circle of light is also the imagery seen when the camera later adopts space traveler Tom's vision as he looks up towards Xibalba. This map unites the three visions of Tom's three avatars as the *conquistador* peers upon this map shown to him by the Queen.

The tripartite theme is represented in the three sites spelled out: Tikal, Yaxchilán, and Chichen Itza. There is a numerical symmetry within the map and outside of it. As the map is being viewed with the four circles of light, there are four figures gazing upon it: 1) the Franciscan monk, Father Avila (Mark Margolis) who brought the sword out of the forest and into the hands of the Queen, 2) the Queen herself who is losing her empire to the control of the Inquisition, 3) the *Conquistador* Tomas who was about to assassinate the Grand Inquisitor Silecio, and the Moorish ally, Captain Ariel, who followed Tomas to stop him from committing the deed, and to take him to the queen. The connection of four and four does not seem significant, but the entire film plays with the repetitions of similar images, numbers, and forms spread out across different mediums or landscapes and objects.



## Chiral Teratology: Monsters in Light and Shadows

The monstrous body always signifies something other than itself.<sup>43</sup> Part of the visual chirality of the film is the mirroring of two monstrous figures, which signify a disease and a cure. For every visual correspondence in the film, the set design, editing, and cinematography create layers and layers of images to reflect the symbolic equivalence of one body to another. The body of Tommy is superimposed on the image of First Father from the Mayan Codex. The image of the tree is superimposed on the body of Queen Isabel. These superimpositions differ from a specific visual concept the film pulls from organic chemistry when Tommy is describing how to bind the ethnobotanical compound from the tree in Central America in order to prepare it for its surgical implantation into Donovan. This procedure occurs at the beginning of the film, the first time the audience sees the present timeline of Dr. Tommy Creo in his medical research laboratory. Tommy instructs Antonius in the chiral properties of the compounds they are working with, and describes them as mirror structures, like “two lovers, woman on top.” Tommy is describing chirality in these compounds, but the film does not enter into too much detail.

Chirality is a term that comes from the Greek word for “hand,” *cheir*, and it is the defining property of optical isomers. Optical Isomers “are molecules whose structures are

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<sup>43</sup>Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. Print.

mirror images but cannot be superimposed on one another in any orientation.”<sup>44</sup> The common example of a chiral object is the right and left hand. Side by side, they are chiral because it is as if there were a mirror in between them. But when the right hand is placed directly atop the left hand, the fingers do not align—the thumbs are on opposite sides, etc. The right and left hand are mirror images that do not align in their structure when superimposed upon each other.

The repetition and correspondence of imagery in the film is an overwhelming barrage, but it effectively communicates the idea of death as creation, circular rebirth in nature, and in Izzi’s conception of her mortality. Amidst the beautifully melded images, this property of chirality stands out as unique in the visually oriented presentation of two monstrous figures in the film, which appear as epic obstacles in the path of Captain Tomas. Izzi creates her own mythological presentation of these two figures. The teratology of the monstrous representation of the Grand Inquisitor Silecio and the Mayan Priest consists of three visually chiral components, which are mirrored presentations but different in their structure: 1) corporeal deformation, 2) bodies in suspension, and 3) an otherworldly position between two realms of existence.

The Grand Inquisitor Silecio’s first appearance in the film and his name both link him with bodily deformation—pain and malignance. In the allegory between the *conquistador* Tomas and Dr. Tommy Creo, the Grand Inquisitor is cancer; he wants to drive it out of the body of his wife. The name of the Grand Inquisitor also has a strong link to the intermingled images of visual technologies, the body of Izzi, and disease.

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<sup>44</sup>(Libretexts 2019)

Corporal destruction and deformation correspond to his character in his first appearance within the film because the first aspect seen of him is his self-inflicted gashes along his back.

This link to corporeality is present in his name as well. The name Silecio does sound like the Spanish word *silencio* (silence), but this phonic similarity does not represent the underlying significance of his name. His name links him to the Latin word *cilicium*, which is the root for the word cilice, referring to “a leather strap studded with metallic barbs that cut into the flesh as a constant reminder of Christ’s suffering.”<sup>45</sup>



**Figure 31** The first image of Grand Inquisitor Silecio (*The Fountain*, 2006)

We first see the body of Silecio as he is striking it with a type of cilice as he sits in front of a hearth, his body shrouded in darkness mixed with candlelight. In keeping with

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<sup>45</sup>“WordWeb Online.” *Cilice, Cilices- WordWeb Dictionary Definition*, [www.wordwebonline.com/en/CILICE](http://www.wordwebonline.com/en/CILICE)

the symbolism of the film, darkness represents disease and death, while light represents life and salvation. This image of a body torn and bleeding in darkness, a man mutilating himself, is a metaphor for the cancer cells of Izzi's own body. A mutilated body is the first piece of Izzi's monstrous mythology of the Inquisitor in her manuscript.

The monster is defined by the spaces it can threaten, and for this reason, monstrous rhetoric is often used to describe enemies of a religious community or a political entity, in line with Cohen's fourth thesis. The Inquisitor threatens the space of Izzi's body in the spatial allegory of the map of Spain because he represents the cancer that Tommy is trying to cure Izzi from. The anxieties of the mythical presentation of a monster represent a threat upon the spaces occupied by individuals and by the community, but the remedy is also found in terms of space.



**Figure 32** The Mayan priest (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The Mayan priest represents the monstrous obstacles to finding the remedy to Izzi's cancer. The priest is chiral to the Inquisitor because one represents disease, and the other represents the cure. The first scene of the Mayan priest mirrors the corporeal deformation of the first scene of the Inquisitor. The viewer perceives him through the gaze of Tomas at the end of a darkened path. The headdress makes him appear monstrous and nonhuman (Figure 32). The Inquisitor is a figure shrouded in darkness as he faces the light. His headdress resembles antlers or horns of an animal, and feather-like threads dot the spinal structure of it. The skeletal structure is animalistic and otherworldly, and recalls thorns upon a branch, as it curls forward in the shadows.



**Figure 33** The nib pen Izzi gives to Tommy before she dies (*The Fountain*, 2006)

Izzi has written this figure as mysterious and monstrous, and he speaks a language Tomas cannot understand. Only the viewer and the reader of Izzi's manuscript understands what he says. The Mayan priest is defined by this extracorporeal aspect in

his headdress as it is echoed in the nib pen Izzi uses for her manuscript (Figure 33). This headdress appears in shadow as a nonhuman corporeal deformation—a chiral monstrous trait mirroring the Inquisitor whose body in light and shadow shows his self-inflicted lashes upon his body before the viewer sees his face. In both cases, the corporeal deformation is the first feature the viewer sees, but it is a mirrored trait—not completely similar to the extent where the body of the Mayan Priest echoes the same structure as the Grand Inquisitor.



**Figure 34** Grand Inquisitor Silecio speaking to the condemned (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The second aspect of the Inquisitor's teratology is the bodies he condemns to death as they hang before him. These figures represent the Queen's supporters who have been tortured and interrogated by the Inquisition Tribunal. They are never named. Within the frame, they hang as collateral in the Grand Inquisitor's conquest against the Queen.

At first, the shot frames only the face of the Inquisitor with his coat of arms behind him. Because of his central position, it seems as if he is speaking to the viewer outside the screen. Slowly, the camera pans out to reveal his entourage of black-hooded figures. The viewer does not see the condemned individuals being spoken to until the camera pans out to include their presence. Their bodies are blurred and out of focus as they hang and shiver. Their clothes tattered and bloodstained. They are positioned around the sitting figure of the Grand Inquisitor.



**Figure 35** The bodies hanging before the Grand Inquisitor (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The camera's focus blurs the bodies which hang between the hidden position of Tomas and the seat of the Inquisitor. The camera adopts the gaze of Tomas, who is intent on extinguishing the Grand Inquisitor, represented symbolically as cancer plaguing the body of Spain. The camera, which leads us to them, is met with bodies in suspension.



Both the Inquisitor and the Mayan Priest exist in mirrored positions along the quest of Tomas. When Captain Tomas Verde goes to kill the Inquisitor, he must descend in a downward direction towards the dungeon of a castle. Bodies of people who have been tortured to the point where they cannot hear the words being spoken by the Grand Inquisitor are dangling between Tomas's hidden position whose perspective the camera adopts and the large seat of the Inquisitor across the forum of hanging bodies.

Izzi, Aronofsky, and co-writer Ari Handel did their research, but take poetic license in their use of historical imagery because their narratives derive more from mythology than history. In reality, the Catholic monarchs utilized the Inquisition as a tool for their control over their kingdoms. The scene of the Inquisitor and his dominion over the mangled, silenced bodies is the disturbing nature of this echo which lacks acknowledgment of the actual victims of the Spanish Inquisition. The fact that the Inquisition, in its most brutal form, was not a mere metaphor or figment of the imagination makes the image of hanging bodies a scene that is grotesque in its omission.

Inquisitor *Sileci* preaches of salvation and freedom from the bodily prison to hanging corpses and the fact that these gruesome images tell a completely different story which sidesteps acknowledgment of the real-life victims becomes a noticeable mark of erasure. It was not just Muslims and Jews who suffered under the surveillance and punishment of this historical institution, but the scene smacks of insensitivity. The film makes use of the historical horrors of the Inquisition to clearly signify the Inquisitor as a force of malevolence and destruction. But amidst the conflict with the Queen and her search for the Tree of Life, it appears the audience is not meant to remember a real



history with critical reflection, but to be awestruck with fear and wonder amidst the stock images of Spanish royalty, clergy, and *conquistadors*.



**Figure 36** The suspended skulls and bones in the jungle (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The second aspect of the Mayan priest's mythical construction is his monstrous lair. The entrance to the pyramid is a landscape dotted with skulls suspended in air. When Captain Tomas Verde goes to the Mayan Pyramid, the space at the foot of the pyramid is covered in a sea of human skulls on spikes or branches. These skeletons appear as if they were floating in the air, and it is a violent foreshadowing of the imagery of the cadaver-like victims suspended before the Inquisitor in the later scene. The set design mirrors the hanging bodies of the Tribunal, but instead of flesh, there are skulls. Instead of hanging from above, the bodies rise above from the ground. Lastly, these are not bodies at all, but skulls propped up, facing the band of soldiers as if they were waiting for Tomas to appear. The hanging bodies in the court of the Tribunal are blurred while the skulls are

almost invisible in the darkness. Both set designs of the suspended bodies visualized as distorted, fragmented ruins are obscured to the vision of the audience.

The third and last aspect of the chiral teratology of the Mayan priest and the inquisitor is the positioning as figures at the threshold between one realm and another. The nature of trespassing corporal boundaries is shared in the imaginary of the monster as well as the rhetoric of contagion. Transgression across accepted limits is what we read in the incoherent bodies of the monsters that dominate and trespass those elements. These monsters materialize as mirrors of our own vulnerability. Both the Inquisitor and the priest are material forms for Tommy's anxiety. Most importantly, they guard the thresholds between life and death according to their own spoken discourse. The monster within the Seven Theses of Cohen dominates the theme of space in the way that it occupies multiple spaces, the way that its body reflects that dominance and inhuman capacity, and the way that the monster possesses the freedom to cross those physical boundaries that create so many anxieties for the spatially limited and vulnerable human being.

This position at the threshold between life and death is the mirrored similarity among the priest and the Inquisitor, but it is chiral because one figure is found at a space upon descent, while the other is found upon ascension. Tomas has to ascend the temple in order to reach the priest, while he has to descend to the dungeons of a castle in order to reach the Inquisitor. Captain Tomas must ascend in an upwards motion when he climbs the steps of the pyramid to reach the Mayan Priest because he is trying to find the Tree of Life, which was hidden after it was removed from Eden. The Mayan priest, albeit

monstrous in his representation, is a barrier to the heavenly pursuit of Tomas. While the Inquisitor's vertical directionality evokes infernal damnation, a hellish doom in a sewer-like dungeon, the Mayan priest's position evokes different anxiety and desire—a nervous ascension towards heaven, towards knowledge and a test of faith or purity. The chirality is seen in an otherworldly position between two realms of existence—similar yet different.

The Mayan priest and the Inquisitor both place themselves as guides or guardians between life and death. The Grand Inquisitor Silecio delivers a discourse of salvation; the conception of the body as a prison to the soul is the dialogue recited by the film's Grand Inquisitor as he peers upon the hanging, tortured, and partially disrobed bodies of the victims of the Office of the Inquisition. As he delivers an extensive monologue on the nature of the body as a prison for the soul, the camera captures the spectacle of the Inquisitor through the eyes of the *conquistador*, who has secretly entered the Inquisition's chambers by descending into the lower passageways of a castle where the name and location are unknown to the audience.

The gaze of Tomas towards the Inquisitor mirrors the shape of an eye, and this visual symmetry in the composition echoes a form of myopia in the film (Figure 37). The camera adopts the gaze of Tomas as the fantastical monstrous figure occupies the center, and the historical violence is blurred within the optical periphery. The *conquistador* Tomas is a silent and secret onlooker who can see the position of one voice (the Grand Inquisitor) speaking over the bodies of the others as they hang before him. The Grand Inquisitor is speaking as if they were listening; he treats those bleeding bodies as an audience when they are clearly past hearing or seeing after the trauma of their torture.

The film does not try to evoke the actual bodies of the victims of the Spanish Inquisition. The entire focus of the lens is on the Grand Inquisitor. The bodies figure as part of the scenery and serve to help the audience associate the Grand Inquisitor with pain, disease, malignancy, and death. Historical violence becomes ornamental in the narrative of Izzi and Tommy's imagination and becomes blurred out of focus within the framework of the film.



**Figure 37** Captain Tomas aiming his crossbow at the Inquisitor (*The Fountain*, 2006)

Ultimately, the monstrous presentation of the Inquisitor is an exotic image of cruelty as Spain is also made Other within this film. In her work, *Exotic Nation: Maurophilia and the Construction of Early Modern Spain* (2009), Barbara Fuchs explains why the image of a Catholic Spain with a Moorish past complicates the generalizations of Orientalism on two fronts. First, “Moorishness and Andalusian elements are intimately known and experienced as a habitual presence,” and secondly, “Spain itself, though the

westernmost part of Europe, is Orientalized by its European rivals in a deliberate attempt to undermine its triumphant self-construction as a Catholic nation from 1492 on” (Fuchs 3). Orientalism operates on a model of distance in the binary model of East/West, but Spain’s uniqueness stems from its intimacy (and sameness) with the Moorish Other.

The chiral teratology in Aronofsky’s presentation of the monstrous Inquisitor demonstrates how the Mayan culture is not the only exotic figure within this film. The Spanish Inquisition serves as a monstrous Other to the enlightened European Self embodied in Queen Isabel. The binary between Civilized Self and Barbaric Other is a repetition transplanted on the conflict between Queen and Inquisitor. This superimposition does not break with orientalist tropes. It simply does what Fuchs describes—moving the border between East and West to include imperial Spain as East. The presentation of the past alternates between the sense of the sacred and the threatening, playing on different chords of *Orientalism* in the mystical aspect of the past and the colonized bodies.

### **Empty Spaces, Forgotten Traces**

Within the film, places depicted in Izzi’s manuscript are emptied of their indigenous inhabitants and imposed with the specific epistemic framework of Izzi’s epigraph from the Book of Genesis. It is the film sequence between Bible, Pyramid, and Palace, which creates this epistemic filter and which makes us perceive non-Christian spaces through a Christian text. As mentioned before, the epistemic filter for the film is

the Book of Genesis in the very first shot of the film. This specific sequence of the film creates a chain of epistemic authority. The film enforces a hierarchy of power in the representation of knowledge.

The Biblical imagery becomes imposed upon the foreign bodies and spaces we perceive in the film. The Mayan pyramid (modeled on Tikal) and Moorish palace (modeled on Seville) appear without a trace of the indigenous meanings and purpose, which may have been assigned to them or echo from their walls and structures. The camera lens adopts the visual language of the same Eurocentric and Christianized perception perpetuated by colonialist narratives and conceptions of space, and this gesture echoes within both constructed spaces of the film.

The Mayan pyramid and Moorish palace are both steps in the journey of Dr. Tom Creo. They represent conquered, erased spaces, but they are also frontier spaces. As spatial frontiers, the sites serve as spaces of transformation and specifically of ascendance. Captain Tomas aims his crossbow at the Grand Inquisitor through an eye-shaped vent in the depths of a castle dungeon. This eye-shaped vent frames the shot and reinvokes the heavy imagery of visual technology. The film creates distance between the scientific, European Self, and both exoticized images of Catholic, imperial Spain, and the Eastern, mystical Other. It repeats the gesture of imagining the time and people as *far away, primitive, epic*. The historical past of imperial Iberia becomes exotic and other-worldly. Captain Tomas must emerge out of the depth to ascend towards his queen in the palace.

The monstrous figures of the Mayan priest and the Spanish Inquisitor occupy two of three frontier spaces. These three spaces manifest the fantasies, anxieties, and hopes of our main characters, Tom and Izzi: the jungle of Guatemala, the Moorish palace of Seville, and outer space. The Iberian Peninsula and the peninsula of Yucatan represented within the depicted manuscript of Izzi, which she writes for her husband, Tom, as she tries to help him cope with her terminal cancer.

The film re-inscribes spatial erasure of colonized spaces, which were renamed and reassigned meanings through the gestures and narratives of conquest. Sacred spaces of the conquered are emptied, occupied, and relegated to the past. Tommy and Izzi dive deep into Mayan mythology, but the Mayans themselves are all marginal figures, while Izzi and Tom are the protagonists, interpreters, and authors at every site where Mayan beliefs are preserved, communicated or reimagined within the film. In the museum, looking through the telescope, at the temple, and traveling through space, they are the only ones possessing a voice and agency within the narrative and action sequences.

The first scene from the film takes us to Genesis, and because the Book of Genesis at the beginning creates an epistemic hierarchy. The Bible becomes the filter through which we perceive the Mayan texts and beliefs, not the other way around. Viewing the verse without sound or a verbal explanation creates a sense of objectivity. The audience does not know who has chosen to write the verse and why, but it is given privilege and power because it is the first scene. In contrast, the first time the audience and Tom learn of Xibalba is through the narration of Izzi. The image of the Book of Genesis privileges the written form, the Christian doctrine, and prefigures all the images

that follow so that we, as spectators, interpret all forms, familiar and foreign, are interpreted by those verses.

The opening scene with Izzi's hand, copying a verse from the Bible into her manuscript, sets up a power dynamic of knowledge production, preservation, and extraction between the Western Self and the Other. The Western Self, which navigates and dominates knowledge production, circulation, and preservation, is represented in the figure of Izzi. She is the only one who wields the pen.



**Figure 38** Captain Tomas ascends the pyramid (*The Fountain*, 2006)

Every image and source of information that represents Mayan cosmology, culture, and knowledge is limited to solely visual, oral, or material sources that exist through Izzi as the vehicle, the facilitator, interpreter, and mediator between the audience and the Mayan figures, texts. We only see Mayans and their cultures in the visual and



auditory form, but their signs, sounds, and meanings are mediated through Izzi. Even the Mayan codices at the museum are translated for Tommy by Izzi.

Among the various mediums of knowledge represented, a hierarchy develops, and written knowledge is given precedence from the very first scene. Writing as knowledge production and preservation receives privilege, and images evoked by the text determine the interpretation of later images. Izzi's manuscript possesses epistemic power in the entirety of the film. Firstly, as stated, its chronological sequence in the film sets up its precedence. Secondly, Izzi's book is a sort of talisman as it is the last trace of Izzi. It is her gift to her husband before her death, and she leaves it for him to "finish it," a phrase that echoes through all three imagined timelines.

This privilege for a singular form of knowledge production, transmission, and preservation mirrors the reality of the roles of writing in conquest. Iberian imperialism privileged writing as a form of knowledge production over other the indigenous mediums encountered, such as *quipu*, orality, and glyphs. Aztec and Mayan forms of knowledge, the *vuh*, and *amoxtili*, respectively, were mistranslated as "books" (Mignolo 73, 118). Colonial narratives and descriptions possessed limited conceptualizations of cultural production. This limitation in understanding separate models for the preservation and transmission of knowledge became a source of epistemic violence when indigenous sources were misidentified, misinterpreted, or misunderstood completely.

Within the image of the *Conquistador* walking within the Moorish palace, we see the second example of a warrior image that serves as the subsidiary Other to the Christian *conquistador* figure. In the image of the *Conquistador* walking through the Moorish

palace, we see a visual appropriation of a space which evokes the quest trope but layers the image of the constellation of Xibalba, of Captain Tom's journey through space against the path of Capitán Tomas Verde as he walks towards his queen.



**Figure 39** Captain Tomas, Queen Isabel (center) and Captain Ariel (left) (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The set design recalls the prayer area of the mosque, the *musallah*, of the 8<sup>th</sup>-century Catedral-Mezquita of Córdoba, complete with the pillars and arches. This image evokes a multitude of unities and disunities. The film's cinematography intends this scene of the individual quest and mobility through time and space, as the candles shine bright like stars to eco the journey into the constellation of Xibalba. The architecture of the Islamic imperial palaces, images of nature, and the Mayan temple imagined are all known, identified, subdued and silenced through the interlocution of Izzi and Queen Isabel.

This image also evokes the way Islamic architecture also appropriated the conquered spaces, such as the incorporation of the horseshoe arches, originally derived from the Visigoth architecture of the buildings, the conquerors then converted into mosques and expanded. In the film, this image is an exotic one because it is a space emptied of the history, the people, the culture which at one time occupied it. Ariel, the Moorish soldier, is an ally of Tomas and walks in silence in the shadow behind him. We do not enter the interiority of Ariel, and we do not question his subordinate role to Tomas. Within Aronofsky's film, the "incorporated weak partner," Said refers to is seen in the form of the conquistador's Moorish sidekick, Captain Ariel.

Spatial erasures also occur through writing in the film. Not only does Izzi's manuscript and incorporation of the Bible mark the bodies of people and bodies of knowledge, but it also marks the architecture of a uniquely Moorish and Muslim space. The hypostyle of the Mezquita-Catedral of Cordoba is recreated in the set design, but the figure of Queen Isabel using it as her palace recalls the possession by the Catholic monarchs after the siege of Granada. The conquered spaces imagined both are examples of spatial erasures because both sites serve to interpret and manifest the Biblical imagery imagined and mediated by Queen Isabel/Izzi and the Franciscan Monk. Indigenous religious relics and texts were hunted down and destroyed, burned by Franciscan friars like Diego de Landa.

The exotic backgrounds are romanticized ornamentation for the romantic plot in the foreground. The film puts the Mayan temples and Moorish palace as the background for Tommy's quest. Tommy's ultimate pursuit is to save his wife Izzi from cancer, which

is overtaking her body and so the audience will see the body of Tom traveling through the darkness as a man traveling a path to save his wife from a fatal disease. The plot naturally evokes this pathos as a motivation for the quest of *conquistador* Tomas and space traveler Tom. The quest is made compelling and overtaken by this emotional atmosphere, which fills the film in the representation of Tommy and Izzi's relationship. The camera reinforces the audience's identification with Tommy and Izzi by constantly zooming into their faces and filling the screen with portraits of Tom and Izzi together and individually. Their faces fill the screen as they are the centers of the narrative. Making the love story span the celestial and terrestrial, making it fill up all the spaces of the universe, makes the film align with romantic tropes when we see a man crossing all distances and dangers to serve his beloved. The association fortifies the motif of the quest and recalls chivalric tales and romances.

The Moorish palace and the Mayan pyramid solely serve as sites of transformation for Tommy to understand the imagination and perspective of Izzi, as she imagines him in the figure of the *conquistador*. The Western Self in the image of Tommy/Tomas/Tom has mobility and agency at both sites. Each site is a space where Tommy transforms and traverses through in the same manner Tom the space traveler moves through the stars. In the Moorish palace, he receives his quest - to cross the ocean and find the Tree of Life. In the Mayan pyramid, Tomas and Tom are both seen as First Father in the vision of the Mayan Priest. He finds the Tree of Life. In the palace, he kneels before his Queen to receive his mission and purpose of his future, eternal union with his queen. Both spaces, the top of the temple and the royal passageway of a Moorish

palace, are not the types of spaces inhabited by the common majority of Mayans and Moors. They are spaces for spiritual and political elites.

In addition to the native spaces of non-Christian cultures, physical elements of nature figure predominantly as metaphorical sites, and catalysts of transformation. Tomas is transformed into earth. The Mayan priest's sword is a fiery object which marks the place on the body of Tomas, which enables his transformation. Tom's journey to Xibalba takes place in the sky—in a celestial space, but the fiery explosion of the dying star is what revives his Treeship. Lastly, water is a very important image in this film, as Skorin-Kapov has mentioned in her analysis. In her analysis, the bathtub scene is a visual reinforcement of Izzi's conception of her rebirth, and the water evokes the womb—a universalizing image. As Skorin-Kapov mentions, Izzi is the one who pulls Tommy into the bathtub. The entire film is a representation of Izzi leading towards Tommy towards her narrative of death. All three are manifestations of the words of the Mayan guide relayed by Izzi. Death is a source of transcendence and regeneration. Skorin-Kapov does not mention the significance of water as an echo of baptism.

This reading of the symbolic significance of water can be taken forward into Izzi's conception of death and rebirth. This image of Tom and Izzi's union, submerging themselves in water, echoes another Christian image of rebirth. Water evokes the image of a womb, but it is also a source of ritual purification, such as a baptism—a spiritual rebirth. Water does not simply echo birth, but the idea of a rebirth and a regeneration, which echoes in multiple scenes. Tom, as a First Father, sacrifices his body when he reaches Xibalba, and this action regenerates the Treeship. *The conquistador's* body

regenerates into the earth, and this occurs by a body of water next to the Tree of Life.

Lastly, the most important manner in which the bathtub scene echoes the theme of *rebirth* in conjunction with other scenes is the fact that Tommy plants a seed upon Izzi's grave in the snow.

Birth is a beginning, but the cyclical temporal structure of the whole film gives priority to the concept of *rebirth*. The film communicates a permanent link to all beginnings and endings. Every ending (death) can be a source of a new beginning (life), and every beginning is born out of an ending. The dying star Xibalba gives birth to other stars. This cyclical theme of rebirth parallels the changing of seasons, which is an idea communicated in the last scene of the film as it makes use of water in its frozen state. The seed Tommy plants lies under a layer of frozen water—bright, white snow. The winter season is associated with death, but planting a seed under that snowy surface is a reminder of the coming spring, which will be born out of this snowy death in nature.

Jadranka Skorin-Kapov's analysis of the bathtub scene in the film also invites a deeper conversation into the representation of *productive* and *reproductive* imagery. In the DVD Special Features, set designer James Chinlund describes how the Mayan pyramid entrance was originally imagined as red, bloody, and narrow like a birth canal—a slimy, gooey passage into the light. The set design creates a visual chirality between the path to death and the path in birth because they represent mirrored processes in the film. Creating multiple sets and shots as dark passageways with alights at the end was deliberate in the decisions made by James Chinlund, Matthew Libatique (cinematographer), and Aronofsky.

The liquids imagined within the film are all linked to the bodies of Izzi and Tom: water, blood, ink, and tree sap. The tree sap which spills from the place Tomas pierces the Tree of life is thick and white as he drinks, and he places it on his wound before it triggers the shooting of flowers from his flesh. Placing a think, white fluid for Tomas to drink at the end of a dark passage originally conceived as a birth canal conjures a doubled imagery of both conception and birth—the milk meant to be consumed by a newborn. In the film, Izzi *produces* the connective imagery on the pages of her manuscript and then gifts that ability to produce with ink and pen to Tommy before she dies.

### **Seeing Circles: Body, Text, Tree**

Izzi's writing upon the page symbolizes her influence upon Tommy. The film re-inscribes a link between corporeality and craft in the images of Izzi's physical being and the images of texts and trees. Among the imagery of three are the tripartite connection of Izzi, her manuscript, and the tree. The film's imagery constantly parallels the body of the tree to the body of Izzi. In my reading of the film, the first parallel made is this opening scene because it is the first image that links her body to textuality. This parallel goes even further in every dimension of the film because every version of Tom and Izzi communicate this tripartite connection.

The film creates a fantastical, circular reimagining of past, present, and future, which mimics the cyclical temporalities of nature. Tommy leaves behind a dark narrative of death and disease to enter an enlightened vision of death as a form of rebirth. Tommy

can see destruction as an act of creation, but the film's visual and narrative incorporation of colonized bodies of space, knowledge, and peoples reinforces *Orientalist* tropes. These tropes persist within mediums of mass culture and invigorate the legacy of European domination over non-European bodies of land, traditions of knowledge, and communities. Coloniality and hierarchy of cultures become natural, insignificant, and subsidiary to the plot of Tom and Izzi in the film.



**Figure 40** The reimagined spirit of Izzi giving Tommy a seed to plant (*The Fountain*, 2006)

The relationship of Spain with its constructed Moorish Other was characterized by intimacy and proximity<sup>46</sup>. The Orientalist Imagery of the film repeats the tropes described by Said and constructs epistemic, temporal, and spatial distance. The imagery of the conquest and Reconquest have been implanted on a new narrative, yet they recall

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<sup>46</sup> (Fuchs 3)



and repeat tropes of representation recalling intimacy and hostility with the Arab, Muslim, and Black Other within the medieval Iberian past. Knowledge of Muslims' habits, customs, and the language was required to articulate and enforce the prohibitions in the first place. The *Reconquista* was a process inlaid with intimacy and hostility.

Though the narrative ascends towards an expanded interpretation of death, the visual language reinforces epistemic violence imposed on Amerindian bodies of knowledge through the logic of coloniality described by Mignolo. The fantastical imagination of the film plays on binaries of life and death, light and dark, salvation and destruction to circumscribe the pathological binary of disease and cure concerning Izzi's body. Izzi's knowledge and narration shape multiple spaces according to her epistemic framework as she and Tommy perceive multiple bodies through visual technologies: the stars and Xibalba gazed upon through a telescope, the cells of a tree from Guatemala gazed upon through a microscope, the Mayan codices viewed in a museum exhibition, the imaginary map of Mayan pyramids gazed upon in light and shadow projected through an imaginary Mayan ceremonial blade, the body of Donovan analyzed through X-ray technology, and the image of Spain gazed upon in candlelight and stained with blood.

Within the film, the camera never adopts the vision of the colonized Other. Every non-White, non-Christian, or non-European figure, place, and cultural object is a background display or a transformative threshold within the spiritual journeys and interpretive agencies of Tommy and Izzi. Aronofsky exoticizes the history of imperial Spain, and the film uses romanticized imagery of Spain and the myth of discovery for a US audience. Every scene reinforces an imperial vision that created specific

representations of indigenous lands, peoples, and systems of knowledge. *The Fountain's* various visual technologies of imperial legibility, possession, and profit in the history of Iberian conquests of Al-Andalus and Latin America create a constellation of binary extremes within the popular imagination regarding conquest.

Moorish and Mayan Other are made invisible within the darkness of the natural and constructed spaces. Muslim and Amerindian figures appear only within the imagination across distance, darkness, and fantasy. They exist with temporal distance within the imaginary of a colonial past; there is a spatial aspect to the distance when we imagine the imaginary geography of both maps presented in the film of Spain or the Yucatan, and lastly, there is a distance in our perspective-we never know them fully as characters with internal emotions and concerns. The spaces of the Moorish mosque/palace and the Mayan pyramid represent the inner states and struggles of Tom and Izzi. Markers of Muslim identity are only present in the past as hollow shadows without a history or acknowledgment of the people who built and inhabited those spaces. They exist only for the story of Izzi and Tommy, without a story of their own.

## Chapter 2: Reinscribing Spaces of Resistance in Radwa Ashour's *Granada*

Radwa Ashour<sup>47</sup> (1946-2014) uses fiction as a space of cultural resistance against erasures of conquest and occupation. Within her novels, she reimagines a history of defeat, and in the realm of imagination, her storytelling reinscribes space, time, collective memory, and cultural inheritance. Voices silenced and lost are revived. The representation challenges the imagery of the Muslim and Arab Other who is the object, the silent ally, the exotic ornament, the subaltern—Ashour reiterates the articulations of selfhood of a community by using fiction as a tool to rebuild the rich internal lives, the thoughts, the emotions, the private and intimate spaces which historiography could never fully taken into account. The novels re-occupy time because the year 1492 is not an ending, and the Muslims of Spain do not simply vanish.

Fiction provides an intimate space as a means to return to the critical moment of 1492. In images and narratives of 1492 and the years following, fiction offers space to problematize the representation of colonized bodies, spaces, and histories. The aim is not to relay a series of comparisons between fact and fiction; rather, it is an investigation into the dynamic ways the historical imagination has been formed, reformed, and challenged through language and imagery. The dynamics of the fictionalized, historical representations investigated are bidirectional as images and narratives of the past constantly project into the present and future and are, in turn, projected upon as well.

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<sup>47</sup> Born May 26, 1946 and died November 30, 2014. Graduated from Cairo University with a B.A. in 1967, MA in 1972. Completed her PhD in African American Literature in 1975 from Amherst University.

The subaltern cannot speak within a vacuum. Fiction becomes a textual *space* to be *re*-occupied by a vision of the visions, voices, and bodies previously left in the margins—the subaltern of Gayatri Spivak’s take on Gramsci’s concept. The work of Walter D. Mignolo, especially his text on *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, & Colonization*, shows how the imperial enterprise which spread from the Iberian Peninsula to the American continent after the union of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, was a territorial project perpetuating a mechanism of epistemic violence. Indigenous conceptions of history, space, time, and knowledge were either conflated, illegible to, neglected by or even destroyed under the processes of control and mediation of an imperial machine, thus restricting the expression of the epistemic heterogeneity, what Mignolo calls *pluritopical hermeneutics*. Fiction serves as a means for remembering what *might have been* the lives and struggles of the individuals who lived through this epistemic violence within the cultural, political, and economic enterprise of transatlantic Iberian conquests.

In his cultural history, Walter Mignolo shows how coexisting systems of time, space, and knowledge were destroyed, altered, and forgotten, and then replaced by a singular imperial vision. The novel recreates the voice of the subaltern by reimagining her conception of time, space, nature, and history. To re-assign meaning to the spaces and bodies (of land and people) which were stamped upon by conquering visions and narratives, fiction serves as the most productive terrain to re-occupy the spatial erasures of what the popular imagination has derived from imperial histories. Mignolo and Said show how the sixteenth-century and nineteenth-century imperial visions and knowledge

of the colonized entities shaped the perception and policy of the colonizers over the colonized, the European, Christian, White construction of Self over the Pagan, Dark Other.

Space is a key aspect to deconstructing the difference which marks the *darker figures* of the type of imagination of conquest represented in *The Fountain*. This case of the “Western” consumption of *orientalized* culture, exotic ornamentation, which evokes the Oriental Muslim figure, is one example of the traces of erasure stamped upon the markers of Arab and Muslim identity. We see these traces represented in material culture, but within the “Western” consumption of that culture the objects are emptied of the history, original significance and meanings within the popular imagination, colored instead with the legacy of *Orientalism*, an epistemic framework dissected and *unveiled* by Edward Said’s foundational work in postcolonial cultural studies.

Radwa Ashour’s *Granada Trilogy* and Laila Lalami’s *The Moor’s Account* use the art of narrative to problematize and challenge, to fill in the figurative and literal emptiness assigned to the diminished, demonized and dehumanized colonial subject—specifically the names (and misnomers) assigned to groups relegated to the margins by a specific European, Christian and colonial perspective within a medieval and colonial discourse. Ashour and Lalami narrate their fictional worlds through the eyes, ears, and hearts of Muslim individuals, and within the contemporary political context, this gesture creates an intensely necessary dialogue between an *imagined* past, our experience of the present, and of course, the potential future. The novels discussed in this chapter focus on the space of Granada and the spaces which marked the identities of its former inhabitants

are taken as traces of their absence and then reconstructed out of the rich ornaments and beauty of what they left behind via Ashour's reinscription of the spaces (sounds, sights, experiences, and stories) in which many negotiated with, fought against or resisted the growing oppression of occupation which criminalized the markers of Muslim and Arab identity in sixteenth-century Spain.

Ashour frames the story, events, and experiences through the point of view of the besieged, conquered, and occupied community of Granada in 1491. Through her novels, we recognize that the conquest of Granada in 1492 was not simply an undertaking of a physical siege or the brute violence of warfare. It was additionally a source of epistemic violence that targeted specific markers of the identity of an entire community. Instead of focusing on the history of Al-Andalus in its so-called golden age, Ashour starts with the moment of loss and continues to delve into the experiences of a Muslim family as conditions worsen. Ashour does not show her protagonists solely as victims. Rather we see individuals who fight, adapt, and cope with death, destruction, and oppression with creativity, defiance, and hope.

The trilogy traces the lives of multiple generations of the family of Abu Jaafar, a papermaker and copyist of Granada. Abu Jaafar and his wife, Umm Jaafar, are raising their two grandchildren, Hasan and Saleema, as they live with the widow of their son, their daughter in law, Umm Hasan (Zaynab). Naeem is a young boy Abu Jaafar, and Umm Jaafar adopted. When the story first novel of the trilogy begins, *Granada*, Abu Jaafar takes in a second young boy, Saad, when the latter loses his employment and Abu Mansour, the owner of the local *hammam*, points Saad in Abu Jaafar's direction. Saad is

the sole survivor in his family from the siege and battle of Malaga. He and Naeem apprentice Abu Jaafar in the Paper Maker's Quarter. Saad falls in love with and marries Saleema, whose grandfather nurtures her intellect and education as a priority over the traditional gender roles and domestic chores her mother and grandmother expect her to learn.

Abu Jaafar also continues to fund Hasan's tutoring and education in Arabic and refuses to leave Granada. The narrative deals in intimate, hidden spaces by showing us the personal relationships and internal struggles of the characters, but the space of Granada itself also figures predominantly within the novel. We see the family life of the family of Abu Jaafar and the actions and decisions they take to cope with increasing pressure and persecution from Castilian edicts and the vigilant surveillance of the Inquisition. Naeem, Saad, and Hasan grow up as brothers but take divergent paths and make unique choices in the face of growing pressures and oppressive sanctions against the Muslims of Granada as they are eventually forced to convert or leave. Hasan marries Maryama, the daughter of a musician, Abu Ibrahim, and Maryama and Saleema become like sisters to each other. Umm Jaafar and Umm Hasan guide the household after the death of Abu Jaafar, but Maryama and Saleema are both symbols of the dual nature of the cultural inheritance of Granada—a system of knowledge transmitted both orally and in writing.

While Naeem and Umm Jaafar are also represented with strong skills of storytelling, Maryama's character is the strongest example of subversion through orality. In addition to her storytelling for her own family, she uses her skills to protect her

community and to put a veil over the eyes of the vigilant church authorities, which are surveilling and seeking Muslims out after the forced conversions. In contrast to Maryama, Saleema is the inheritor and protector of the written knowledge she learned to treasure from her grandfather. Ashour alternates amidst multiple family members' perspectives throughout the three novels from the community, which witnessed the taking of Granada (1491) up to the last edict of expulsion against the Moriscos (1609). In addition to discussing the themes of cultural inheritance, spatial erasures, identity and the representation of the nonhuman (nature, animals and plants) within the narrative, I will discuss how Ashour goes beyond the colonial narrative of erasures and the Orientalist representation and objectification of indigenous subjects by emphasizing the characters experiential narratives of their history, their own stories, and space, time and culture which is the filter of their experiences.

When historiography treats the subject of Muslim Spain, the story ends with 1492. As Ashour shows in her fiction, there was still a Muslim presence on the peninsula after 1492, but Ashour reframes the erasures through Muslim eyes. Ashour shifts the narrative and problematizes three moments of possession, destruction, and violence within the public space. Ashour's writing serves to collapse the spectacle of imperial possession over to bodies of indigenous Amerindians and Granadans—bodies of land, bodies of knowledge, and the physical conceptions of their bodies and natures. Ashour depicts the family's experience with the spectacles of violence.

First, there is the procession of Columbus on his way to Barcelona as he is displaying his newly seized possessions through Andalusia. This is the first spectacle we



witness in the novel, and the sense of wonder and awe quickly shifts into melancholy when the children identify with the other figure of oppression—the Amerindians they see walking in chains on display as bodies possessed. This image of bodies possessed will repeat within the narrative in different but mirrored forms.

The second spectacle of violence I will discuss is when Abu Jaafar witnesses the burning of Arabic books in 1501 by order of Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros. Soon after witnessing the burning of the books, Abu Jaafar dies, and the death of her grandfather creates in Saleema an obsessive zeal to absorb what knowledge to understand the causes of death and disease. Ashour depicts this moment, which takes place in the public space, the plaza of Bib Rambla through the eyes of Abu Jaafar and Saleema. By making the reader see it through their eyes, she makes witnesses of all the readers in the spectacle of cultural destruction. The last scene of violence, which marks the end of the first novel in the trilogy, is the death of Saleema, accused of witchcraft by the Tribunal of the Inquisition.

*Granada Trilogy* was first published in Arabic as the *Thulalaythiyat Gharnata*. For this analysis, I am using both the English and Spanish translations of the novels. Only the first novel of the trilogy was translated into English by William Granara, and it spans the years 1491 to 1527. For this chapter, I will focus on the English translation and then for the next chapter of my analysis; I will focus on the Spanish translation of the second two novels of the trilogy, *Moraima* (Maryama), and *La Partida* (The Departure).

Ashour redresses the silences, absences, and erasures created within the colonial vision and narrative. Ashour makes witnesses of her readers to the lives lived under

Castilian occupation in Granada. However, Ashour's trilogy is not mired in nostalgia for a glorious past; her narrative does not focus on anything before 1491. Rather than focusing on the period when Muslim sovereignty existed on the peninsula, by shifting our focus to the period immediately after, she enhances the framework to understand the true moment of defeat. Ashour does not return to the "golden age" of Al-Andalus, which is lauded and idealized for its cultural innovation and tolerance. By showing us Granada as a community that kept fighting, adapting, and resisting the measures taken against their history, culture, and identity—Ashour's narrative becomes more valuable for reimagining a marginalized experience of history and for asserting a sense of self-determination in this retelling of events. The fiction becomes more real when the characters are less than ideal. It is a more compelling narrative to see Muslims battling adversity and coping with defeat.

Rather than focusing on what Castilians proclaim each time a new sanction against Muslims—we can only hear, see, and feel from the perspective of the Muslim protagonists. We never see Muley's document itself—Ali relates it to Maryama. Ashour makes use of the chains of narrations, oral networks of the Muslim communities because orality is a valid and strong mode for the transmission of information. Every official historical event is facilitated first through a Muslim's point of view. There is no pretense of objectivity. Part of the logic of the selection of documents cited in the text emanates from language. Ashour wrote the trilogy in Arabic. Muley wrote the *Memorial* in Spanish. Ali is the one who relays Muley's protest to Maryama, because a woman of her generation would only have experienced the document in this way, in Arabic.

## **Time and Space in *Granada***

The second and third novels of the trilogy contrast directly with the first because of the spatial dynamics changes from a narrative of occupation to a narrative of diaspora. The narrative moves from exploring the confinement of prison cells, the desperation of sieges, and the surveillance and suffocation of occupation to the violent trauma of diaspora and forced migration. It is in the second and third novels of the Moriscos who are forced to leave Granada after the Revolt of the Alpujarras and resettle in various regions of the kingdom until they are finally forced to leave in 1609.

Radwa Ashour refills and “re-populates” the landscapes of sixteenth-century Granada with the people that were forcibly removed from it. Her fiction marks this violence by reconstructing the remaining traces and the resultant absences of mass occupation, conversion, and expulsion for us to reimagine and remember the past with what I believe is an urgent necessity for the present and future. The trilogy incorporates great detail in how the characters experience the urban and rural spaces of Granada and Aynadamar. The fictional representation of space and becomes a critical commentary on the interplay on private subversions and public oppressions.

The first novel in the trilogy is not named for a single character nor for the family, which is the focus of the novel, rather Ashour names the text for the place which occupies the central narrative: Granada, or *Gharnatain* its Arabized pronunciation. The trilogy’s title is a critical starting point as it evokes the entire space for the readers. It is significant that the trilogy’s title takes its name from the space of Granada itself. As identity enters as a critical theme in the novels, the space of Granada is the foundational

site of engagement of the communal and individual identities depicted. Radwa Ashour's own words describe how physical spaces are metaphorically dense with meanings that connect the past and the present.

These are not childhood reminiscences. They are seeds which were to grow into an obsession to record. Record as the ancestors did. Record what? A geographical space dense with a resonant history, a composite of past and present, overlapping territories constitutive of an emotional and moral space for self-awareness and self-definition. (87)

Fiction opens a path for the type of self-awareness and self-definition she describes as a counter-narrative of the erasures of Eurocentric historiography. Ashour is describing memories of her childhood in Egypt. In her article, "Eyewitness, Scribe, and Storyteller: My Experience as a Novelist," written for *The Massachusetts Review*, Ashour recounts how her personal history and experiences growing up in Egypt shaped her motivations as a writer, Ashour begins by detailing the spaces and the ways they impacted her daily consciousness. She begins the article by describing the geography and mythic history of her birthplace as if pointing to her home upon a map and then transitions this macroscopic vision into a microscopic perspective, focusing on the collective memories contained in individual structures and the view from her bedroom window. This detailed exposition of the interaction between space, the people who inhabit it, and the memories contained within each element of a constructed and natural space, parallels the narrative style seen in the novel when Ashour introduces the reader to the space of Granada. The reader is introduced to space itself before becoming acquainted with other characters.

It has long been recognized that imperialist claims to the right of occupying “empty,” underused, undeveloped space for the common good of mankind should be taken for what they really are: a monstrous lie perpetuated for the benefit of one part of humanity, for a few societies of that part, and, in the end, for one part of these societies, its dominant classes. But by and large we remain under the spell of an equally mendacious fiction: that interpersonal, intergroup, indeed, international Time is “public Time”—there to be occupied, measured, and allotted by the powers that be.<sup>48</sup>

Ashour remakes time and expands the moment after 1492 to show how Muslims and their descendants did not simply evaporate from the Iberian Peninsula after the conquest of Granada. The historical moment of 1492 is often reduced and imagined as an ending point for Islam in Spain and a beginning point for European expansion in the “new world.” Conceiving 1492 as a neat transition in time between the Medieval and the Modern undermines the reality of the extensive and nuanced processes and experiences that occurred.

Ashour’s work stands out for the re-appropriation of space above all other aspects. How individuals utilize and imagine space and time are key components of identity. Ashour’s narrative depictions of external and internal spaces of the public and private life of the Muslims and Moriscos of Granada add a constant note of awareness for the multi-faceted occupation and oppression faced by the family members as both the public and private aspects of their Muslim identities are besieged, condemned and expelled by the imperial institutions.

In addition to space, time must also be re-occupied in order to reproduce the voice and life of the subaltern figures of the Castilian occupation of Granada. As Fabian

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<sup>48</sup>Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. Print. 144.

writes, the imperialist narrative artificially creates the emptiness of time and space it is designed to occupy and possess Ashour's novel directly shows us the layers of life which filled the intimate and public spaces of Granada. Ashour shows how the lives of Abu Jaafar's family are changed to compare their experiences before and after the occupation, and she also shows the transformation undergone manifests within the representation of space. The narration of a free Granada is full of life with different sounds, the feel of a bustling urban space. In contrast, the narration takes on a tone of estrangement and emptiness to show the effects of imperial occupation, which creates an aesthetics of absence both through physical violence and the epistemic violence.

Ashour expands the space being occupied by the characters in each part of the novel, whether that space is a physical one or a subjective, internal space. The novels create a reassigned textual space for the Muslims of Granada whose spaces –their homes, their mosques, and their businesses-were slowly occupied. Her novels manifest a textual return and re-occupation of the spaces the Moriscos were violently (through epistemic violence and physical violence) forced to vacate a homeland they had inhabited for generations. Fiction creates a whole new territory for people displaced. The reason fiction manifests a productive space for reproducing a lost image and perspective of the past is because of the author's freedom to reconstruct the internal spaces of individual subjectivities in addition to the specific function of historical fiction to return readers to historical spaces of the past.

The trilogy breaks with *Orientalist* imagery of Granada and the heavy focus on the Alhambra. The first book of the trilogy focuses initially on this urban space of

Granada, and the readers fully identify with the ordinary inhabitants of the city as opposed to the nobility or royalty of the Alhambra property and palace. The Alhambra is both physically and removed and omitted from the narration. Within the novel's depictions, the Alhambra might as well be as far off as Egypt or Syria, because it is treated with the same distance within the minds of the common people, the urban population of Granada.

What does Ashour's text achieve in depicting the space of Granada? Firstly, she fills it with the people who were eventually forced to leave. Before she shows the intense displacement experienced by Abu Jaafar's descendants, Ashour has to firmly place the reader into what the daily pulse of the city before the Castilian occupation. The narration follows Abu Jaafar's footsteps as he surveys the city, circumambulating the shops and streets in his habitual manner. The Treaty of Capitulation has just been decreed, and while many families are selling their possessions and evacuating the city, Abu Jaafar refuses to leave and refuses to stop educating his grandchildren in Arabic. Before mentioning any physical property or objects like his house and his books, which Abu Jaafar will refuse to sell, we see the enactment of a corporeal and spatial ritual as Abu Jaafar uses his days to traverse across the specific sights and sounds of urban Granada.

He walked down to the bank of the Darro and strolled along the river, enjoying the Sabika and the fortresses and castles of the Alhambra. He delighted in the many species of trees that sprouted up along the river, from the cypresses, palms, and pines at the foot of the hills across the river, to the fig, olive, pomegranate, walnut, and chestnut trees that graced the road that lead to Albaicín. He passed by and inspected each tree closely and then gazed at the river. When he came to the Grand Mosque, the river appeared in full view and picture-perfect. Then, looking over to the open square, he didn't fail to notice the relentless hustle and bustle of buying and selling and the familiar voices that called out their wares. He

continued his walk and headed east until he reached the Jewish Quarter and the Najd Gate, then retraced his steps back to the marketplace, passing by the Alley of the Druggists, on to the Potters, the Glass Makers, and then to the covered market where he walked through every single passageway, running his fingers through the cottons, wools, and silks, both raw and embroidered, while the merchants were busy measuring and weighing, buying and selling, on the cuff or haggling. When he left the covered market and cut across Zacatin Street, he found himself once again at the Grand Mosque. He went in, performed his ritual ablutions, completed the four prostrations required of the midday prayer, and two extra ones in observance of the Prophet's custom, before returning to his shop in the Paper Makers' Quarters.

On another day he would either follow exactly the same route, or he would begin by paying a visit to his son and his parents at the Sahl Ibn Malik Cemetery. He would recite the opening chapter of the Quran, and then cross one end of the quarter to the other to visit the Potters' Cemetery and speak with a friend of his who was buried there. Abu Jaafar always kept a vigilant eye on Granada's buildings, its schools, mosques, hospices, shrines, and public gardens, as though he had been commissioned to draw detailed sketches of them. (Granara 21-22)<sup>49</sup>

Part of Ashour's realism comes from her concrete descriptions of space. The constructed spaces and the natural spaces appearing in the novel, and both play a role in re-occupying the memory of Granada. Space anchors human experience and memory. This drives the sharp contrast with the social death we witness. The narration engages the reader in a sensory experience as Abu Jaafar moves about the city. The narration places the most weight upon the auditory and the visual as we navigate the city through Ashour's prose.

*Granada* shows a Muslim city embedded with the memories of generations of lives and deaths, and the occupying forces of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel are painted as distinctly *foreign*. The spatial erasures of Moors and Moriscos in the historical occupation, conversion, dispersal, and eventual expulsion from the expanding Spanish

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<sup>49</sup>Granara leaves out the accent in the place name for the Albaicín, but I will maintain the accent in the name for the sake of consistency in my discussion of space in the trilogy.



empire is a drawn-out process of making the Other disappear, while only leaving a few of the spaces and ornate surroundings they once inhabited. The historical fiction turns the shadows and memories left by this physical absence into people and faces who would have occupied every part. Mosques were often converted into churches whenever Christian forces seized a town. As Kroesendescribes how the principal mosques of Muslims cities seized by the Christian in the Reconquestwere consistently transformed into churches and each spatial conversion of the most emblematic religious building was followed by the subsequent celebration of the first Mass in its interior to symbolize a public manifestation of Christian supremacy (115).<sup>50</sup>Over time, many mosques became cathedrals built in the Gothic style.

### **Collective Spaces and Divergent Perspectives**

In chapter two of the first novel of the trilogy, we first see the character of Saad as he enters the local *hammam*, or bathhouse, owned by Abu Mansour with his master (who is never named). Working as a servant, and helping his employer with the water and scrubbing, Saad listens to the emotional debate of Abu Jaafar and the other men in the crowded bathhouse as the men argue over the current circumstances the community is now confronted with. The men debate over the treaty which has been made with the Castilians, the possibility of fighting against the army and artillery of the Castilians, whether the Castilians will keep their word or “put the sword of expulsion to [their]

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<sup>50</sup>Kroesen, Justin E.A “From Mosques to Cathedrals: Converting Sacred Space During the Spanish Reconquest.” *Mediaevistik*, 21 (2008). Pp 113-137.

throats, and whether they can expect aid from North Africa, Egypt or from the Turks if they actually attempted to fight instead of surrendering (Granara 10). The debate is ended abruptly when Abu Mansour tries to attack Saad's employer for his offensive comments—for dishonoring the allegedly deceased Mousa Ibn Abi Ghasan, a figure the community had been talking about because everyone knew he had objected to the agreement struck by Abu Abdallah Muhammad (also known as Boabdil) at the Alhambra and because of the rumors of his drowning in the River Genil.

Two important aspects of the *hammam* scene are the space itself and the debate which ensues. Ashour anchors the moment in the historical event of the meeting at the Alhambra, but the fiction corresponds to her realist style because, unlike the readers and historians, the people of Granada did not know what was going to happen afterward. The heterogeneity of opinions and feelings echoed within the *hammam* help readers enter what that historical moment potentially felt like for the common people like Abu Jaafar, Abu Mansour, and Saad. Abu Jaafar is the first character whose emotions and perspective we follow. After hearing the news of the treaty, the reader is privy to his contemplations and his immense sadness and wonder at the course of events, though he tries to reassure himself “with concise facts and logical reasoning,” he reminds himself that “Everything changes except the face of Almighty God” and recalling the torrid history of the land and its rulers he concludes: “Who knows what will happen tomorrow? [Abu Abdullah] is not the first of them, nor the last. They’ve all come and gone, may Granada remain safe and sound, with God’s permission and will...” (Granara 6).

Rather than re-exploring the spaces and historical actors which have been painted over by layers and layers of *Orientalist* imagery and narratives, she goes down the path away from the Alhambra and towards the Albaicín, framing our vision away from the spaces which have been consumed, occupied and completely obscured by *Orientalist* fantasies. But Ashour has revived a specific type of space, in that she has reconstructed a space which was one of the many casualties of the erasures of conquest. *Hammams* were common and used to occupy every other corner of historical Granada before the occupation. The public bathhouse was a communal space that was destroyed by occupation.

Ashour shows how it is a community space where men and women could relax or engage with each other, rather than showing it as the site of exotic, sensual fantasy. The *hammams* in Granada were later prohibited and shut down by Castilian occupation.<sup>51</sup> The *hammam* represents a space of the common men and women—a public space that was regularly visited on a daily basis. Rather than placing the debate in a tea shop or individual home, the *hammam* is a public meeting space, which 1) played a special role in the cultural and spiritual identity of the Muslims of Granada and 2) was a specific type of cultural space erased from the cityscape of Granada.

Additionally, the spatial orientation of Ashour's characters changes the vision of the reader who re-enters historical Granada. The Alhambra and the Generalife are top tourist destinations in present-day Granada but, within the novel, every reference to the

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<sup>51</sup>Reklaityte, Ieva. "Gender, Ethnicity, Religion and Sanitation After the Fall of the Muslim Granada Kingdom in Medieval Spain." *Historical and Archaeological Perspectives on Gender Transformations Contributions to Global Historical Archaeology*, Mar. 2012, pp. 87–103., doi:10.1007/978-1-4614-4863-1\_5.

palace atop the hill is from a perspective removed and distant. The ordinary men gathered in this *Hammam* reside in the Albaicín, and have ordinary occupations for that period in time, and they do not possess an Apollonian view over the land and history like the vision of Izzi and Queen Isabel in *The Fountain*.

Saad is a servant, Abu Mansour, a bathhouse owner, and Abu Jaafar, a bookbinder. The palace and fortress of the Alhambra would not have regular destinations for them. The location of the scene is connected to how the novel's narrative is *grounded* in the perspective of regular people, not the perspectives of royalty, or members of the dynasty and the court at the Alhambra—the usual suspects that populate epic historical accounts and orientalist fantasies. This is only the second chapter of the novel, but from the very beginning, Ashour breaks away from the binary representation of Muslims in Spain as either villainous or virtuous. Many of the voices are anonymous, but because of the lively characterization of the debate and the difference of opinion we hear among them, the debate does not emanate from a faceless mass of dark figures like the unified bodies of the Mayan warriors of Aronofsky. Human emotions do not disappear, and Ashour paints the community's voices with diversity and a compelling sense of uncertainty.

The *hammam* is the public debate the reader observes through Saad's perspective. The debate helps readers empathize psychologically with the uncertainty of the human being living out the historical moment- it is a moment of doubt, fear, anxiety over the future, and it completely lacks any sense of epic proportions or the fulfillment of destiny found in retrospective accounts of history. The moment also gives the reader a view of

the different mentalities, different forms of logic the community is using to reconcile events, and to figure out how to act in their best interest-for their survival and dignity.

Ashour makes the reader privy to the heated debate through the perspective of Saad because the moment when the community is uncertain over what action to take is an important one, which helps factor in the struggle to process what was happening. The majority of voices that enter the conversation are not even named, but this debate reminds us that 1492 did not occur in a vacuum. There is an open distrust of the Castilians' potential to honor the terms of the *Capitulaciones*, which, as Abu Jaafar reminds his companions, are "merely ink on paper;" there is an open feeling of resistance to the terms of surrender and submission, and lastly, there is a sincere desire for peace (Granara 10).

Ashour expands our conception of what the Granadans must have been experiencing by having one of the men allude to the series of military campaigns that King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel had been carrying out against Muslim territories. One of the participants of the debate responds to Abu Jaafar's rally to fight by saying: "Why should we fight them? Aren't ten years of war enough? Do you want us to end up like the people of Malaga eating our own mules and the leaves off the trees?" (Granara 10)

This reference to the series of military campaigns that continued to advance the Castilians through the Muslim territories and eventually towards the center of Granada is another important way in which Ashour's text expands our limited notion of the "fall of Granada." It was, in reality, a series of military campaigns that eventually led Ferdinand and Isabel to finally possess the keys to Granada. In his text, *Islamic Spain: 1250 to 1500*, L.P. Harvey helps account for why Granada receives most of the focus in our

notion of historical events, and he pays special attention to the military and strategic consequences of the Siege of Malaga in 1487:

Quite naturally the conquest of Granada attracts more attention because it marks the end, but the fighting at Malaga was in reality more important. If Malaga had not been taken first, then supplies and reinforcements could not have reached the Muslims in Spain from abroad. Even though none of the North African states (still less any of the eastern Mediterranean states) was in any position to intervene with massive force, even a trickle of aid might have enabled the Granadans to fight on for a considerable time. Malaga was to be the most important battle of the whole war.<sup>52</sup>

The memories of Malaga are the freshest in the minds of the characters. The siege of Malaga takes place offstage in a sense as it occurs before the period of the first novel, but its aftereffects are still felt in the neighboring kingdom of Granada. The community knows what happened there, and they still respect the heroes who sacrificed and fought for Malaga even with the defeat. The events of Malaga have already irrevocably marked one of the key protagonists, Saad. Harvey emphasizes how the siege of Malaga truly *cuts off* Granada to the potential aid and support via the sea, which could have come through Malaga. This macroscale military defeat connects to the microscale because early on in the novel, once the Capitulations are signed, Abu Jaafar feels *cut off* from all hope. Malaga is the first macroscale in the external historical space whose ripples reverberate in the private and intimate spaces of the home of Abu Jaafar's family after they adopt Saad. Saad became an orphan because of the siege of Malaga.

The image of orphanhood repeats in the figures of Naeem, Saad and Abu Jaafar. Naeem and Saad are both orphans adopted by Abu Jaafar. After the Capitulations are

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<sup>52</sup>(Harvey 295)

signed, Abu Jaafar is filled with a deep sense of abandonment, and the specific language of the novel when we enter his mental state describes him as feeling orphaned. In the events which continue in the second novel of the trilogy, the reader sees how the violence of the occupation leads to the death of Saad and Saleema. Their daughter, Aysha, becomes an orphan. Ali's father abandons the family. Saad abandons Saleema for a time when she emotionally abandons him with neglect.

The phrasing of this historical moment connects to one of the important jobs of the fiction of Ashour. In the language which recalls the history of what happens as a *siege, conquest, or the fall*, the agency of the people who fought to save their home and who died to preserve and protect their cities is lost in a language of erasure. The Alpujarras, or *Al-Busharatin* Arabic, was not the only site of resistance (Granara 72).

Why is Malaga important as a starting point for the action which takes place before the novel? Ashour's novel constantly connects macroscale events with microscale events. Malaga is a major military defeat in the final days of Muslim sovereignty in the peninsula. One key feature of the novel, of course, is to show that Muslims still live and fight after 1492, even when the Muslim sovereignty over their land and people disappears. As is oft-cited, the Battle of Navas de Tolosa is a key turning point in 1212 because, after that defeat, Muslim-controlled territory in the peninsula continues to diminish, but there is a spatial and symbolic significance to the major defeat which more closely precedes the taking of Granada.

## Storytelling as Return, Recreating Sensory Experience of the Subaltern

Historians like Harvey cannot portray the internal world of the Muslims of Malaga. Writers of fiction can intimate secrets that historians cannot. As E.M. Forster points out in Chapter 3 of his work, *Aspects of the Novel*, words, looks, and gestures are historical evidence that can be known by an outside observer, but the people that inhabit the pages of a fictional novel can be opened up even in moments of silence because the writer grants access to their inner worlds or what he calls their *hidden life*. He uses Queen Victoria as an example:

The historian deals with actions, and with the characters of men only so far as he can deduce them from their actions. He is quite as much concerned with character as the novelist, but he can only know of its existence when it shows on the surface...The hidden life is, by definition, hidden... And it is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source: to tell us more about Queen Victoria than could be known, and thus to produce a character who is not the Queen Victoria of history.” (Forster 45)

There are multiple references to the fighting at Malaga, especially through the character of Saad, who lost his entire family during the siege and battle of Malaga. Ashour does not just reimagine the external space of Granada; she also reimagines the internal space-the memory characters. Saad loses his job after the debate at the *Hammam*. It is a moment where the focus is not just on *erasures*, but how to resist loss through memory:

That was not the first time Saad found himself without any source of sustenance, as he thought about the days when his future appeared to him like a winter morning enveloped in a thick fog in which you could hardly see your own footsteps. *Those* days he used to ruminate over his past, the distant past when the branch grew freely, and the not-so-distant past when it was snapped off the tree, blown about by the stormy winds. And the more he tried to recall what had



happened, the more the details came back to him, ones that had slipped his mind. He was astonished that he could forget, but more astonished that these memories came back to him with a sudden new clarity, and after thinking about it somewhat, he became certain that nothing was lost, that the human mind was a wondrous treasure chest, and that however deeply lodged in the head, it preserved things that couldn't be counted or weighted: the scent of the sea, his mother's face, pale shafts of sun that filtered through the green vine leaves moistened by drops of rain, threads of silk on his father's loom, his grandfather's hacking morning cough, the laugh of the little girl, the taste of a fresh green almond, a broken jar seeping olive oil, or a solitary rosary bead that had rolled behind the chest of drawers where he used to hide.<sup>53</sup>

The details of Saad's memory serve a dual purpose. First, they feed our imagery of his internal world, of the lost home he still misses and ruminates on when he is alone with nobody else around. This passage is an example of how space possesses a critical space in each character's identity. These sensory memories color the internal world of Saad from Malaga—like the scent of his sea and the laugh of his sister, Nafeesa. Ashour shows how the micro can possess the macro because as the passage states “nothing [is] lost...the human mind [is] a wondrous treasure chest, and that however deeply lodged in the head, it [preserves] things that [cannot] be counted or weighted (Granara 12). There are multiple layers to be hacked in this collection of sensory memories that run through Saad's mind.

The memory of sensory experiences through extreme narrative detail involves the recreation of scent, sound, taste, and vision. The girl from whom that laughter emanated is gone, but Saad remembers a sensory detail that carries the reader into a narrative that reinscribes life over death. Ashour's use of the sensory experience dots traces of life over a blank space because the reader knows nothing about Saad until we enter these

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<sup>53</sup>(Granara 12)

memories. No matter how minimal the traces, the details the reader can imagine from Saad's life in Malaga bring to the forefront the lived experience of occupied subjects over the accounts of death and destruction. The death and destruction do not disappear, but they are sources of silence that must be counterposed with sounds, scents, and tastes like the memories of Saad.

In this passage, we see two important images that will become visual metaphoric motifs for the rest of the trilogy: the chest and the tree. First, Saad's inner narrative describes the mind full of memories as a chest where nothing could be lost: a wondrous treasure chest, and that, however deeply lodged in the head, it preserved things that couldn't be counted or weighted (Granara12). The image of buried treasure that, unlike gold, cannot be counted or weighted within any system of economy, exchange or circulation –this image is the first description of capital which does not look or act like capital. Saad describes the memory of these moments from his past as a sort of wealth that would not be recognizably measured or valued in traditional terms of wealth. The image of the tree branch, which is snapped off and blown away by the wind, is a symbolic image that also repeats throughout the trilogy. The branch represents Saad when he was living or *growing* freely amongst his family members in Malaga before the siege of the city. Saad survives famine but loses his family and travels as a refugee to the kingdom of Granada. The anecdote of the branch for Saad's loss of his home and his family echoes later images of displacement and *rootedness* used in the narration of the second and third books of the trilogy.

## **Cultural Capital - The Inheritance of Abu Jaafar**

In the novel, we see a family that maintains an intimate relationship with the culture of written knowledge. By virtue of the events witnessed in the novel, the lives of Abu Jaafar and his descendants are literally attached to the written word. The novel does many things with the theme of written knowledge as Ashour also incorporates various historical and literary documents from the period which serve to both lay the framework for the historical background brought to the foreground in the lives of the characters as well as serve as a source of intertextuality, to draw specific parallels which mirror the lives of the characters and create stronger connections between the history of the past and the crafted fiction we witness in the present.

For Abu Jaafar, Granada also exists, lives, and survives in words on the page. Abu Jaafar is not worrying about what will happen to himself and his family unit, what colors his emotion is the fear for what will happen to the community itself. Later we learn how invested he is in his grandchildren's future. He hopes for Hasan, his grandson, to become a historian, so he pays for his schooling and invests in his learning Arabic. He hopes for his granddaughter, Saleema, to become a lady of great learning. His desires for his grandchildren are built upon the same cultural capital his profession has been based upon. Educational expenses to pay for the tutors and schooling of Hasan and Saleema take priority. Rather than gold or silks, the inheritance Abu Jaafar is saving in order to pass on to them is his collection of manuscripts. Abu Jaafar calls the Capitulations of 1481 "merely ink on paper" because of his open distrust of their words, no matter the medium.

However, Abu Jaafar assigns a very high value to ink on paper, and we see this when he is teaching Naeem the craft of bookbinding:

He trained him in tanning and drying goat hides for binding. He taught him how to arrange the pages of a manuscript and bind them together. He taught him how to arrange the pages of a manuscript and bind them together. He allowed him to undertake every task save a couple he preferred to do himself. He instructed Naeem to follow him closely so that he could learn: to thread the twine into the awl, and slowly and carefully pass the awl and thread through the spine of the book, once, twice, a third and fourth time, back and forth until the stitching was tight; then he lent him attach the spine to the cover and place the book under a press. Several days later, he would remove the book from underneath the press and Abu Jaafar would write the title and the name of the author, as well as the owner of the manuscript, in gold ink or something else that may have been requested. Finally, he would engrave the cover with intricate patterns.<sup>54</sup>

Saad and Naeem initially enter within the family structure as orphans with unknown origins, unknown families, but Abu Jaafar becomes their teacher and protector and virtually adopts them as part of his own family in addition to making them his apprentices and trains them in the craft and art of bookmaking—so they too become linked within the familial relationship to written learning culture as they learn how to bind scripts and decorate manuscripts with ornate calligraphy.

Ashour presents a family whose value for knowledge and learning is not confined by traditional conceptions of gender. In the beginning, we meet Abu Jaafar, who commands a workshop for bookmaking, where he teaches his children and adoptive children/apprentices who copy, decorate, and preserve Arabic manuscripts. The novel establishes a parallel between the “living” texts (symbols of learning) and the lives of the descendants of Abu Jaafar. Abu Jaafar is a father who never prevents his daughter, Saleema, from fulfilling her desire to read and learn from the manuscripts which adorn

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<sup>54</sup>(Granara 2)

his workshop despite his wife's protests against Saleema's absence in the daily cooking and cleaning tasks of the household. He recognizes the social capital, to enrich his family by an immaterial measure –a measure of letters instead of coins.

In contrast to the indigenous cultural production in Arabic and Muslim texts which are represented within the trilogy, the trilogy removes the epistemic authority from colonial texts and historical documents written in Castilian. Documents like the Capitulations of 1491 are mediated within the voices of the Granadans in the novel. Readers only learn the context of the historical moment through the voices Ashour has written in Arabic.

In the novels of Ashour, the texts and narratives which receive precedence are the texts which emphasize the experience of life as opposed to loss. All the primary documents which Ashour cites are from the Arabic language, and this is significant for three reasons. Ashour wrote the trilogy in Arabic. Citing primary sources that would have been in Arabic seems natural and logical. But she also shows documents that were not historical but were essential to the experience of the collective identity of the Muslim community. In the Nikkah contract of Hasan and Maryama (even when Hasan cheats on her), Ashour creates a critical commentary on the duplicity of language through her interpellation of the Castilian documents and proclamations. The Castilian language documents are all interpellated or mediated through Arabic voices and conceptions. Furthermore, later proclamations nullify previous promises made in Castilian. The language starts to lose its meaning and value. Although people tell Abu Jaafar to teach his grandson Castilian and not Arabic, Arabic survives and continues to carry the weight and

space of shared experience for the descendants of Abu Jaafar until the very end. (In the last two books of the trilogy, Abu Jaafar's grandson Hasan secretly teaches Arabic to his grandson Ali. Ali then goes on to become a teacher of Arabic and inherit the basement full of manuscripts that Abu Jaafar and Saleema saved and hid away in the family's country home in Aynadamar.)

The original novels were written in Arabic, but that is not the only reason the perspective presents Castilian historical documents like the Capitulations of 1491 through mediation. Ashour's writing inverts our experience of Western historiography, and every event which linked to the official history is narrated solely via the perspectives of the collective community and the protagonists of the family of Abu Jaafar. The *Capitulaciones* is the first historical document Ashour explicitly alludes to within her fiction, but it is through the voices in the *hammam*. It is Saad's former employer who outlines the terms for readers as he reminds his fellow *hammam* customers of the conditions promised:

The treaty stipulates that we be treated honorably, and that our religion, customs, and traditions be respected, and that we be free to buy and sell, and that we preserve our rights to our property, our arms and horses, and that we have legal recourse to our judges in arbitrating matters of dispute. Even our prisoners shall be returned to us, pardoned and free.<sup>55</sup>

The temporal scope of the novel shows us that Muslims did not disappear in 1492. They were promised certain rights. L. P. Harvey provides a translated summaries and fragments of the Capitulations of 1491, and in the *hammam*, the voice from the dialogue

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<sup>55</sup>(Granara 10)

above is quoting from the third (to be treated honorably and not to have their property taken), sixth (to have their religions and customs respected), seventh (to be judged according to *sharia*), eighth (right to keep their arms and their horses except any small or large cannons) and twenty-fourth capitulations (to free any Moorish captives in Christian hands [316, 318]). Besides the anchoring in the historical document of the *Capitulaciones*, the most important aspect in Ashour's fiction is to show how the community fights back when the terms of the capitulations are not held up. Every single protection which was summarized in the *hammam* will be taken away during the narrative of the novel, and the readers will experience this betrayal and exploitation through the intimate lens of the thoughts and emotions of each person of Abu Jaafar's family.

### **Space and Nature as Inspiration: The Living and Learning of Hayy and Saleema**

Ashour's fiction subverts the limitations surrounding the imagined colonized subject by expanding the epistemic framework. Knowledge is fundamental because, as Said has written, "knowledge of the Orient...creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world" (40). Ashour expands this imaginary and limited world of the Morisco Other through fiction. The narrative of colonizing discourse itself becomes a metaphorical cage or prison which entraps the colonized objects within its limited degree of possibilities. Ashour expands the epistemic framework of nature within the perspectives of her characters.

Ashour's characters show strong identification with animals and nature. I have already discussed the use of the imagery of water for describing how the news of impending occupation came over the community *in waves*. Animals, plants, and the land itself do not possess a voice in the face of occupation. They have no say in the matter, and this lack of agency, of representation - of passive vulnerability- strikes a chord with the emotional status of Abu Jaafar at the beginning of this trilogy. Chapter 1 of the first novel ends with the image of a trapped bird:

Abu Jaafar was making every effort to calm his soul, which felt at that moment like a caged bird flapping its wings in fear of a sharp pointed knife. He was telling himself over and over again that Granada was safe and that it would survive. He jammed his mind with words, and extended his hand through the netting to his soul, stroking its wet feathers and its quivering body, soothing and caressing it, singing to it a soft lullaby to rock it to sleep.<sup>56</sup>

Abu Jaafar is feeling trapped and helpless, and Ashour uses the image of a caged bird to communicate the fear which pervades his inner space. Abu Jaafar senses real harm in the impending occupation, and it is inescapable terror. What is the difference between his mind and his soul in the passage above? They are inextricably connected, but he swiftly jams his mind with words while his soul receives a very different sort of treatment. With his soul, he is delicate and tender-the same way he would treat a real, living bird. He sees a naked woman, takes off his cloak, and wraps it around her. He and his wife find Naeem on the street, an orphan lost and alone, and take him in when they find he has no family and no home to speak of. Even the care and attention he shows when he instructs Naeem how to bind a book gives readers an insight into how much love

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<sup>56</sup>(Granara 7)



and care this man has for his craft, for his fellow human being, for his family, and his community.

The analogy of his soul to a bird reflects both his deep identification with nature as well as his conception of his own soul as something which requires as much care as a living entity. All the words used for his metaphorical actions are extremely delicate: *soothing*, *caressing*, and *soft lullaby*. Because Abu Jaafar identifies deeply enough with nature to have it represent his very soul, this perspective of a Muslim and animal imagery puts human beings and animals on a much more even, horizontal plane. Granada itself is personified in the passage, and we get the sense that his conception includes the people, the trees, the sky, the rivers, and the land itself. For Granada to be safe for Granada to survive, Abu Jaafar is also concerned about his people's culture. As a bookbinder, Abu Jaafar is concerned with the cultural survival (and death) of Granada.

Within the novel, there is a sensation that Abu Jaafar and his family are being crushed by the external forces at work. Ashour's novel adds a meaningful contribution to the work of Vincent Barletta and Mary Elizabeth Perry in their work on the parallels in parables from Aljamiado texts and Morisco legends, which provided inspiration and strength to the communities after the Castilian occupation of Granada and the forces of cultural hegemony. The danger in these narratives of resilience is normalizing the suffering, which is anything but normal. Abu Jaafar's family is forced to adapt. In a chapter entitled "Patience and Perseverance," Perry writes:

Facing so many difficulties as they struggled to keep their families alive and intact, Moriscos must have found comfort and inspiration in their own legends. Many knew stories of Old Testament figures who had been acknowledged in the Qur'an and recorded in Arabic and Aljamía. These writings about Abraham,

Moses, Joseph, and Job told of hardship and faith and promised the ultimate triumph of the faithful. Passing them on orally, Morisco women and men could have told the tales simply for diversion, or they may have chosen to tell them as a form of consolation, encouragement, or even resistance. When Morisco women gathered to tell tales, few Old Christians would suspect that these familiar Old Testament might carry messages of subversion—messages even more effective, perhaps, than the whispers of rebellion from the few clandestine gatherings of Morisco men who dared to ignore prohibitions on their meetings.<sup>57</sup>

The first book of the trilogy, entitled *Granada*, draws upon profound intertextuality with the work of Ibn Tufayl Al-Andalusi, the 12<sup>th</sup>-century philosophical fiction *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. The intertextuality is based on parallel narratives that incorporate the protagonist's relationship to the image of the gazelle. The novels use the image of the gazelle to parallel Abu Jaafar's granddaughter, Saleema, and Ibn Tufayl's protagonist Hayy Ibn Yaqzan.

Ashour links Ibn Tufayl's text and the imagery which connects it to Saleema's story to the image of the formation and fragmentation of a family unit. The marriage of Saleema and Saad, their transformation into a new family unit, serves as the source and foundation for the parallel of the gazelle as a baby gazelle is the *mahr* Saad gives to his bride. Her gazelle becomes her most prized treasure, and as we see in the novel, it becomes like a child and Saleema, like an adoptive mother. In the story of Saad and Saleema, two deaths are linked together: the death of Saleema's first child and Saleema's pet gazelle. Both deaths magnify each other, and this moment leads to the fragmentation of Saleema and Saad's relationship as well. After the death of her firstborn, Saleema becomes withdrawn; she isolates herself within her reading and neglects her relationship with Saad. But the books are not an escape. Saleema, like Tommy Creo, is obsessed with

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<sup>57</sup>(Perry 124)

searching for a cure. Later on, it is clear that the deaths make her more dedicated to her studies of the medical knowledge in the Arabic texts she has kept hidden.

*Hayy ibn Yaqzan* is the tale of a boy who becomes a man after the passing of his mother. The parallel between *Hayy* and Saleema is made all the more interesting when we consider Saleema's double alterity as a Muslim and as a woman. Both parts of her identity interact with her clandestine profession as a scholar and later as a healer. Set against this intimate space of the household, Saleema's position within the household aligns with the values maintained by the family's patriarch. Saleema's characterization manifests respect for knowledge and education, and this foundational identity is built on written knowledge.

Ashour uses the parallel of *Hayy* to show how nature inspires knowledge within the cultural traditions of the Muslims of Granada, both spiritual and profane forms. The Moriscos are forced to convert and accept the doctrine of the Bible, but the character of Saleema preserves a different, coexisting cultural and epistemological framework. As a secret Muslim, she does so clandestinely, and her textual sources are circulated while hidden undergarments or stowed away in secret compartments and floorboards. Through Saleema and her family, Ashour incorporates the Qur'an with the Islamic epistemic framework. In the Qur'an, animals speak, and nature has rights. Within the novel, animals and nature become sources of silent solidarity and reflect the emotions and struggles of the human characters.

Ashour's novels depict the constant parallels and links between Saleema and the gazelle. There are multiple moments of great importance in Saleema's life and death, and,

in addition to all of them being linked to the written word, all are constantly joined with the image or presence of a gazelle. Saleema's marriage to Saad serves as the source and foundation for Saleema's love for the gazelle. Upon the marriage of Saleema and Saad, a baby gazelle is a *mahr* (bridal dowry/gift) Saad gives to Saleema. Her gazelle becomes her most prized treasure, and as we see in the novel, it becomes like a child and Saleema, like an adoptive mother. This is how their relationship is described when the gazelle passes, like a mother losing her child. The novel inverts the story of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* as Saleema is a mother figure to her child figure, the gazelle, while Ibn Tufayl writes a mother figure gazelle who takes care of the child figure of Hayy. In Ibn Tufayl's narrative, Hayy ibn Yaqzan has unknown origins but, like Moses, is left to float in a basket upon the water, and the infant is found on the shore of a deserted island, where he is adopted by a gazelle. The gazelle becomes Hayy's mother.

When Saad becomes enamored of Saleema and his proposal for marriage accepted, the reader gets to see how he meets the Islamic requirement of providing his bride with a dowry despite his lesser means. It is part of the traditional Islamic marriage etiquette to provide the bride with a dowry (*mahr*), even if it is something as small as an iron ring. Radwa Ashour shows this Islamic ideal of a family who accepts a good man for his character as opposed to his material possessions.

The image of the gazelle links to Saleema's love for learning as the motif of the gazelle in Saleema's life parallels Ibn Tufayl's philosophical fiction of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*. The connection between Ashour's representation and Ibn Tufayl's work represents a profound relationship of intertextuality. Both parts of Saleema's identity—Muslim and

woman— interact with her clandestine profession as a scholar and later, as a healer.

Ashour relocates the figure of the woman through the underpinnings of nature, knowledge and Muslim identity to place her back into a place which popular “western” culture has, at times, made her invisible-into a culture of learning to gain knowledge as a communal and individual, cultural and spiritual treasure (even beyond a social capital) of Spanish (Granadan, Valencian, Toledan, etc). The family of Abu Jaafar is the center of our vision of this moment in history. It is Saleema’s pen, which traces the outline of a gazelle but not as a zoological manual. Rather than depicting the animal as an inferior object of study, Saleema identifies with the gazelle intimately. Saleema’s intellectual pursuits, emotional relationships, and social isolation draw constant parallels to the tale of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.

The *locus of enunciation* which Ashour portrays in the mind and intellect of Saleema shaped by indigenous Andalusian Arab knowledge traditions establishes a mode of perceiving nature and animals which contrasts with the animalistic imagery Ashour utilizes in describing the public displays of Castilian possession and occupation which dehumanize characters like Saleema as Other, as less than human. The link Saleema manifests with nature and knowledge becomes distorted, perverted, and criminalized in the narrative of the Tribunal and their sentence.

The parallel learning and connection to nature seen in the portrayal of Saleema and her literary counterpart, Hayy, convey a deeper alliance between the alterity of Moriscos in Granada and their indigenous perception of Nature. Both become exploited, preyed upon, and destroyed for the sake of a specific colonial, modern, “westernized”

worldview after 1492. With the family of Ashour, animals and nature echo the feelings of their soul and inner emotions. Ashour's characters conceive of their subjectivities in images of nature and animals.

After Saleema receives the gazelle from Saad, she cares for it like a child.

Animals inspire Saleema's intellectual interaction with the world around her and issues of life and death. Nature is a force of being and knowing the external world and the internal self for the family of Abu Jaafar. Saleema's intellectual life is punctuated by her experience and death and the departure of loved ones. As a child, she questioned where her father went when he died. After the burning of the Arabic manuscripts by Cardinal Cisneros, she questioned how Abu Jaafar died without any known illness. Her pet gazelle died, and soon after, her first child died in the cradle. Surrounded by death without understanding the cause, Saleema is sparked into an intellectual obsession with death, disease, and nature. She bears great parallel with Dr. Tommy Creo in this regard. She isolates herself and devotes her attention to her books. Saleema's preservation of Arabic manuscripts is her passion.

In the trial of Saleema, and the surveillance of the Moriscos, the life of the Moriscoslike animals hunted and preyed upon. AiméCésaire, in *Discourse on Colonialism*, writes about how the colonizer sees the colonized *as an animal*, in the negative sense (less than human). This perception and treatment of the colonized by the colonizer transforms the colonizer into an animal:

Colonization [...] dehumanizes even the most civilized man... colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing

the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal. It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonization that I wanted to point out.<sup>58</sup>

In the locus of enunciation through which Abu Jaafar's family sees themselves, animals are not without dignity. When Saleema's activities come under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition, her actions become distorted by a different locus of enunciation. The treatment of Saleema reflects the same degradation described by Césaire. Ashour's narration pays attention to the treatment of Saleema's corporeality when the Inquisition seizes her. The language of Saleema's condemnation also connects her alleged criminality to her corporality.

Saleema is an educated, literate woman as the reader gains intimate insight into her love of knowledge and the special link her knowledge has with nature, but when Castilian authorities come and take her, she caged (like a bird or animal) and carried away. This imagery of Saleema hunted and then caged is painted as a barbaric, illogical, and malicious act. Saleema stands before the Tribunal, but first, she is forced to enter by walking in backward, and according to the narration, this counts as one of many "unnatural acts" to which she is subjected (Granara 213).<sup>59</sup> In the Spanish translation, the action is described as "*al contrario que cualquier ser humano*," (contrary to any human being), to describe the act of walking backward, which is also called a "*rareza*," (rarity or strange phenomenon) (Comendador 269). The Spanish translation addresses this estrangement with two phrases, whereas the English translation condenses the sense of

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<sup>58</sup>(Césaire, Pinkham 41)

<sup>59</sup>Salima debía entrar en la sala de espaldas y dar unos pasos, al contrario que cualquier ser humano, hacia atrás. No era esa la única rareza con que se había encontrado desde que la llevaron hasta aquel lugar días atrás. (Comendador 269)

the estrangement into one phrase, as an “unnatural act” (Granara 213). In both translations, the prevailing idea and tone resonate that the Tribunal implementing its power is enforcing a system that is *contrary to human nature*. The Tribunal appears as an authority that is cruel, arbitrary, and, as we have seen, possessing *unnatural* expectations imposed upon people like Saleema.

The language of the Tribunal *creates* a criminal out of Saleema’s actions. When Saleema tried to sketch a picture of a gazelle, the Tribunal interprets it as Satan. When Saleema reads, transcribes, and hides Arabic medical and philosophical texts and learns how to cure maladies, the Tribunal condemns her for witchcraft. The official history and documentation which the scribe will write for Gloria Alvarez (Christian name of Saleema) are completely subverted within the representation of Saleema’s perspective.

Saleema’s body and actions are criminalized through the language of cultural hegemony, words over her condemned body as a witch for her actions as a healer. This discourse of hegemonic authority precedes the physical death of Saleema. The speech act of the inquisitors creates the reality which they have created and *de-legitimizes* the reality which Saleema would attest to herself. As Gloria Alvarez, she is condemned. As Saleemabint Jaafar, she conceives her life and death according to her own terms. Ashour gives a perspective into her inner dialogue so that the readers receive an articulation of her life framed within her perspective instead of the discourse of the Inquisition, which only embodies her death and the erasure of her identity as a Muslim, female scholar and healer. The Inquisition’s conception of Saleema is damning.



## Divergent Destinies

Ashour's characterization of each descendant of Abu Jaafar helps readers experience the heterogeneity of the histories of occupied communities and the various, differing manners in which the reconciled or resisted their circumstances. Rather than scattered traces of a past erased, the fiction of Ashour, etches out clear paths chosen and negotiated by Saleema, Hasan, Saad, Maryama, and finally, Ali. Ashour places readers in the most uncertain of atmospheres when we follow Ali and Maryama under the edict, which dispersed Granadan citizens to resettle in multiple sites of the kingdom.

Abu Jaafar's descendants experience their lives and possibilities limited and controlled by colonial epistemic authority. The roles they are given mirror the roles given to the Oriental by Cromer and Balfour in Said's description of *Orientalism*'s dehumanization through language.<sup>60</sup> As Said states, "the Orientalis depicted as something one judges (as in the court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual)".<sup>61</sup> It is clear why Said uses the word "something" (four times) rather than "someone" because, in a colonial framework, the colonized subject is a mere object of the colonial gaze, an object inferior to and defined by the subject who perceives and narrates the colonizing discourse.

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<sup>60</sup> Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books: New York, 2003. P. 40.

<sup>61</sup>For these case examples, I will use the term "Other" instead of "Oriental" to refer to the dehumanized status assigned to each of Abu Jaafar's descendants (including his adopted apprentices Saad and Naeem).

The novel uses the story of Naeem in America side by side with revolts in the Albaicín to narrate echoes of violence in the transatlantic experience under imperial domination. Ashour shows the parallel between the Morisco Othering and the Amerindian Othering. I apply Said's examples of incidents that show this connection as well. The parallels drawn are not meant to conflate or amalgamate the dehumanized groups, rather it is meant to draw attention to the parallel mechanisms of epistemic violence executed in the occupation of Granada and the taking of land in Latin America. Said's description serves as a concise enumeration for the treatment shown in Ashour's novels, but it is the perspective of the novel, which grants the subjectivity, agency, and narrative center from the perspective of the occupied Others.

Multiple family members face trials by the Inquisition, but Ashour's novel shows Saleema's testimony in the most detail in her testimony and judgment before she is condemned to death. Saleema's judgment forms the major conclusion of the first novel of the trilogy, and it forms a violent unity in the first book because it recalls the depiction of the public burning of the books by Cisneros.

Saleema is judged and condemned as "the Oriental is depicted as something one judges (as in the court of law)," but Ashour forms alliances between constructed alterities across the ocean (Said 40). When Naeem travels to the continent with Father Miguel, the process through which Father Miguel observes and documents the indigenous culture from afar without engaging in conversation with the people themselves is deemed strange to Naeem. For Father Miguel, the people he observes are not speaking subjects with agency and narratives of their own. They are bodies to be interpreted by his pen, to be

converted to Christianity, and then to be preserved in memory under the language he has assigned to them. The Amerindian is the other subaltern figure as “something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual)” (Said 40).

Saad participates in the Alpujarras Rebellion, and when he is caught transporting supplies from the coast to the communities of rebels hiding out in the mountain, his body and mind are both punished and broken as he is imprisoned by the Inquisition as well. Saad and Saleema both face the consequences of the Inquisition’s “discipline” towards the body of the Other. All the cases mentioned above parallel examples of an institutional public policy toward the Other, but Ashour expands the experience through the perspectives of her characters. It is only through the deeply personal portrayal of these events that the readers are reminded of how terrible the experiences must have been. The distance between past and present is cut through to the readers via a very intimate perspective. These examples serve as another source of the constant connection between the internal and external Ashour emphasizes in the trilogy. The experiences leave scars, imprints on the personal lives, minds, and emotions of characters like Saad and Saleema.

Lastly, the Other is an object of illustration, because emphasizing the visual aspects hollows out the internal world of individual people Ashour expands for us. Like animals in a painting, the Amerindios and the Moriscos are all assigned a solely visual, ornamental, and, for the most part, a silent existence by the oppressive gaze of the Inquisition, which constantly surveils them. The Amerindian and the Moor as an object

of illustration (without a voice or story independent of the Eurocentric perspective) also echoes the scant traces of Mayan and Moorish figures, which amount to mere shadows and stereotypes. These shadows are used to populate an imperial imagination and are given scant attention except in service to the European, Christian protagonist who drives the narrative and possesses agency and epistemic authority.

### **Recreating Soundscapes and Silence**

It's just like what Granada used to be. The voice of the muezzin rings out, and you can hear chanting and singing at the wedding feasts and out in the fields. We speak in Arabic without any restrictions, we dress the way we're accustomed to, we sit in vigils for the coming of Ramadan, and we celebrate the two feasts.<sup>62</sup>

A key element of the spaces Ashour revisits in her fiction is the soundscape of each space, and the soundscape is a key element of the community's identity, which undergoes change with the occupation and forced conversions. The sounds speak to the experience of the community, and the occupation is characterized by a type of sonic death, which symbolizes and foreshadows a form of social death being imposed upon the community within the public spaces of Granada. In the passage above, the character of Saad is describing an abandoned mountain village which has served as a refuge for rebels

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<sup>62</sup>(Granara 157) In the Spanish version: Es como la Granada de antaño, Hasan. Te acostumbras a escuchar la voz del almuédano, las canciones en las bodas y en las huertas. Hablamos en árabe sin empacho y a todas las horas, nos vestimos con nuestras ropas de siempre, observamos la luna para saber cuándo empieza Ramadán y celebramos las dos fiestas grandes. (Comendador 197) The Spanish version includes details the English version does not—it mentions looking at the moon and the type of clothes the Muslims wear.

Ashour describes the soundscape of key moments within the novel in order to fully immerse the reader within the experiences of her protagonists and in order to communicate important information in understanding the perspectives of her characters. Soundscape adds another mode of communicating the emotive state of the community—sound and silence give the readers yet another sense to identify the internal goings-on of the people of Granada. Sometimes, the juxtaposition of what characters hear in their surroundings and what they are processing on the inside can also communicate the tension and feeling of total upheaval caused by the occupation.

Sounds and silence communicate important information, and early on in the novel, Ashour's characterization of Abu Jaafar and the people of Granada emphasizes the way they listen and receive information. This reinforces the importance of the soundscape, and this also highlights the importance of orality within the culture of the transmission of information for the inhabitants of Granada and for the time in which they live. We see an example of the importance of orality when the town crier circumambulates the town to announce the details of the new agreement between the Castilians and the court of the Alhambra, and when the town crier passes Abu Jaafar, Abu Jaafar "walked out toward him till he stood right next to him" and "listened carefully to all the terms of the agreement," as the King of Granada and all other public officials have to hand over power to Fernando and Isabel within 60 days (Granara 4). The entire social and political culture is about to be overturned, and Ashour gives us a tiny peek into how diverse and multi-faceted the educated society of Granada was, with "military officers, judges, and chamberlains, scholars and lawyers" (Granara 4). Abu Jaafar, as if

he needs to hear the news repeated, again and again, to recover from his disbelief, goes on to follow the town crier as he circulates the news. We as readers need to pay attention just like Abu Jaafar, and what is especially noted in the phrasing of the description is the fact that Abu Jaafar and his community direct their attention to the silences as well. In case we don't get the message, Ashour further emphasizes the importance of listening to the people of Granada:

The people of Granada always kept their ears to the ground and were prone to gathering as much information as possible. Whenever the town crier announced an item of news or the Imam at the mosque ascended the pulpit before the Friday prayer to expound upon a given subject [...], they listened out of a need for reassurance or for something to hold on to, and they were quick to fill the gaps left by any missing information from these public pronouncements. But this time, even though neither the town crier nor the Imam announced anything concerning the Alhambra meeting, Abu Jaafar, like everyone else, knew what had transpired there.<sup>63</sup>

After this description, the narration goes on to provide a summary of the meeting at the Alhambra where the treaty was signed and where Mousa Ibn Abi Ghasan stormed out in anger and disappeared (Granara 5). The people of Granada listened *out of a need*, and this characterization of an entire community points the reader directly towards listening carefully as well (reading carefully) for the information conveyed within the soundscape of the novels. The changing soundscape is used to show the effect of the dramatic changes in the occupation on the populace—Ashour uses sounds to *show us* what the community is feeling rather than just *telling us*. But as we see in the passage, Abu Jaafar also pays attention to the gaps of information, the silences. Later in the novel, drums will accentuate the sense of doom. Silence will symbolize a social death or loss of

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<sup>63</sup>(Granara 5)

hope. Sounds (and silence) in the narrative communicate another important aspect of erasures of the community's identity (the identity of Granada), and this incorporation of the sonic elements of experience enhances the fully immersive space created within Ashour's fiction.

One initial sonic communication Ashour gives us is the direct contrast between the waves of voices which wash over the space of the city and the all-encompassing silence that follows the arrival of the Castilians. The sequence of the two passages and the descriptions used to illustrate a metaphorical drowning and death of the community itself—all communicated through sound. This metaphor begins with imagery of the people's voices sweeping over the shared spaces of the city like water. Ashour combines concrete descriptions of space for the reader to feel the movement of the sonic commotion and life flowing within the city. The reader sees a strong oral presence and connection, which links the community together. After the news of the meeting at the Alhambra, the community is triggered by news of Mousa Ibn Abi Ghasan's disappearance and rumored drowning. Ashour reinforces the imagery of drowning, of being swallowed up by violent waves in order to fully illustrate the disorientation and sinking feeling of the community itself:

For three nights neither Granada nor Albaicín slept. The people talked incessantly not of the peace treaty but of the disappearance of Mousa Ibn Abi Ghasan. They were swallowed up by rumors that swept in waves from the River Genil to the Ainadamar watercourse, from the Najd Gate to the Sahl Ibn Malik cemetery. The news seeped into all the streets and throughout every neighbourhood, as well as into all the public gardens. The waters of the Genil carried it from the outskirts of the city and brought it into the Darro where it crossed over to the west bank. From there it traveled to Sabika, Alhambra, and the Generalife. It reached the end of the east bank that connected to the old Casbah and Albaicín. It extended beyond the

walls and gates of the city, past the towers and the fences of the vineyards, toward the Sierra Nevada from one side, and toward the Gibralfaro to the other.<sup>64</sup>

The city is being overtaken by the terrible news as if the river were flooding and drowning the city, swallowing it up—and swallowing up all of what was left of Al-Andalus with it. The image of the rumors and tension spreading through the city and echoing across from the mountains to *Gibralfaro* is a foreboding image of gloom made all the more so by the fact that the last point etched out in this visual mapping of the terrain is the *Gibralfaro*, which was the site of the castle where the horrible siege and eventual occupation of Malaga took place. The image of water, which is usually associated with the ritual purification (*wudu*) of Muslims before their daily prayers and with the gardens of Paradise in the descriptions of the Qur'an (gardens beneath which rivers flow) takes on a violent and tragic significance because of the recurrent image of drowning.

The water imagery is also present in the name of the Ainadamar watercourse; it is mentioned in the footnote of Granara's translation as the Arabic name for the Fuente Grande, "from the Arabic '*ayn al-dam*,' the fountain of tears." Later on, in the novel, characters like Saad are brought to tears upon recalling past events and in witnessing the circumstances before them. When emotions run so deep that the characters are unable to express their pain in words, we see tears and sobbing among both women and men. In the summary of the meeting at the Alhambra alluded to earlier, young king Abu 'Abdallah

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<sup>64</sup>(Granara 3-4)



Muhammed sobbed, and his attendants are the first ones to cry: “as tears flowed from their eyes, the signed [the treaty]” (Granara 5).

Before and after the rumor of Ibn Abi Ghasan’s drowning, one image sticks out in Abu Jaafar’s mind. Abu Jaafar recalls the naked woman who had passed by his shop as if in a trance, asking himself if she could be a sign, a vision or omen because in his head she seemed like a “phantom,” too shocking a presence to be real bone and flesh (Granara 3). But days later, Naeem tells him that the naked corpse of a woman had been found drifting in the river Genil (the same river Ibn Abi Ghasan was rumored to have drowned in). The news strikes a hard blow in the mind and soul of Abu Jaafar. Abu Jaafar is characterized as stoic, but the readers experience the soundscape through his character, and he does not tell Naeem about what he means when he replies to the news by saying “there's no escape,” but it seems confirmed in his mind that the floating corpse of the woman he had tried to help was indeed a sign of terrible things to come: The river’s currents had swallowed up the last hope. The cord of the nation was severed, and God’s children have been orphaned (Granara 3).

The visual links which spring to mind in this short passage are again the image of drowning and the image of the womb. The image of the womb and the umbilical cord is a significant one. Ashour uses the images of space and the nonhuman elements which inhabit it to show the depth of Abu Jaafar’s loss; it is a loss of faith. Again, the symbol of a sustaining and purifying concept like water is completely inverted violently, and rather than picturing the link of life and sustenance offered a child within the protection of the womb, here the sense of abandonment and fragmentation takes over. The image of an

entire community being orphaned is a violent one. The water carries the news the same way the river carries the corpse of the young woman who never spoke her name to Abu Jaafar. The woman was silent as if in a state of shock, and because of her silence, she was akin to a corpse even when she was alive. The loss of hope spreading through a community and flooding the entire region is the precursor of a watery grave—a social death which will enter with a deadly silence to mark the occupation of Granada (Granara 3). While the town crier moves through every part of Granada, the people are in mourning, and he is surrounded by “a dense mob of townspeople”:

People avoided looking at one another in the eye, and they tilted their heads to hide their broken reflections and trembling eyelids. They walked with their arms closely held to their sides. They moved their heavy feet slowly, in an atmosphere of silence eerily reinforced by the town crier and the rustling of dry, yellow leaves.<sup>65</sup>

The news has spread like the shadow of death, and an uncomfortable silence has taken over the community. Their feet are heavy and slow as if they are already in chains as if they are already trapped—with no escape. After following the town crier through the town, Abu Jaafar fails to calm the tension he feels in his soul and walks all night through the town until finally reaching the bank of the River Genil. At that moment, at the end of the very first chapter of *Granada*, the water from the river obscures Abu Jaafar’s vision completely and again, visually, there is *no escape* from what he sees as he stares into the water of the river:

He stared into its waters and the phantom of the naked woman appeared as though coming out of the water toward him. He fixed his gaze more closely, and this time

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<sup>65</sup>(Granara 6)

could only see the ripples of the water. Then she reappeared on the surface of the water, ivory-like, growing bigger in death, until she covered the entire surface of the river. He stood motionless and began to sweat profusely.<sup>66</sup>

The sweat of Abu Jaafar's brow is the last form of water we see in the first chapter. The chapter begins and ends with the image of the woman's body. The woman is seen walking without registering her surroundings, her body bare and vulnerable. She might have been numb from trauma and is most likely a victim of a skirmish between Castilians and Muslims in one of the neighboring villages. Her presence is a reminder of the horrors of war and occupation. She is not a ghost. Without a name, and without knowing her story, she is still a dominant specter within the novel.

Ashour evades fantastical and mythical proportions in her representations of the central family and their surroundings. Abu Jaafar's effort to interpret the mystery behind the naked woman adds realism because Ashour depicts the variety with which the people of Granada may have tried to reconcile the events they were witnessing mentally. Ashour recreates the engagements with the space of her characters, their knowledge systems and stories, and lastly, she reminds us that the subaltern is not inherently a silent figure. The subaltern exists as a silent, inferior outsider through language. Abu Jaafar's struggle with the impending Castilian occupation is based on a deep fear for his home and his family.

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<sup>66</sup> (Granara 7)

## **Subversion, Submission, Secrecy**

The novel shows how some Muslims, especially the elites, willingly converted to Christianity after the occupation; however, the central family of the trilogy chooses to maintain their Muslim identity despite the criminalization of Islamic practices by Castilian authorities after 1501. Historically, there were entire villages of Muslims which chose to accept Christianity rather than having to abandon their homes.<sup>67</sup> The Muslims who wanted to keep their religion were forced to hide their Muslim identity and had to erase all external signs of their Islamic faith. They had to replace them with external signs of what needed to appear as a sincere Christian conversion with Christian names, regular attendance of Mass, Baptisms and Christian education for children, etc.

The creativity and adaptation required to maintain outward appearances and live through these dual identities—of being a Muslim in private and a Christian in public—is best portrayed in Ashour's fiction through a sensation of intimacy with the subjective, inner worlds of her characters. Ashour exposes the inner spaces of her characters within the privacy of the home and the innermost thoughts and emotions. As E.M. Forster has pointed out in his work on the nature of novels, this type of access and knowledge to the inner world of an individual does not exist in daily interactions and relationships in real life:

In daily life we never understand each other, neither complete clairvoyance nor complete confessional exists. We know each other approximately, by external signs, and these serve well enough as a basis for society and even for intimacy. But people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist

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<sup>67</sup>Dadson, Trevor. "The Assimilation of Spain's Moriscos: Fiction or Reality?" *Journal of Levantine Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, Winter 2011, pp. 11-30. Print.

wishes; their inner as well as their outer life can be exposed. And this is why they often seem more definite than characters in history, or even our own friends; we have been told all about them that can be told; even if they are imperfect or unreal they do not contain any secrets, whereas our friends do and must, mutual secrecy being one of the conditions of life upon this globe.<sup>68</sup>

Fiction provides the freedom to portray the inner subversion and outer submission of the secret Muslims of sixteenth-century Granada. Caroline Seymour-Jorn describes the rich inner lives Ashour creates for her female characters, which challenge gender stereotypes by presenting women who are rational, ambitious, imperfect yet resourceful in tackling both small and large challenges which appear in their daily lives, often as a consequence of the historical circumstances (128).

Ashour links of the microcosm of family life and the macrocosm of historical realities by grating the inner space is a narrative authority over external narratives, and this move is what Seymour-Jorn calls “a history of the subjective” (109). The narrative movement between external and internal is fluid as “Ashour seamlessly interweaves the public and private together” and “Ashour effectively intertwines social and political contexts with the intimate psychological worlds of her characters” (128).<sup>69</sup> Every historical event, every space, and every reference to Castilian prohibitions upon Granadans filters through the subjectivity of the Muslim, Arab characters.

There is a constant tension of this private preservation and public appearance in the collective spaces inhabited by the family and their community. The texts which were allowed to escape the burning were all the medical texts containing scientific knowledge,

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<sup>68</sup>Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. New York. 1927. Print.

<sup>69</sup> Seymour-Jorn, Caroline. *Cultural Criticism in Egyptian Women's Writing*. 1st ed. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011. P 109-129. Print.

but this fact echoes further violence as medical texts only served the physical bodies, but all texts about the Muslim soul and thus the metaphysical identity (linked to the physical) were sanctioned and censored, thus resulting in a metaphorical death of the community and its spiritual, intellectual and cultural identity.

Maryama convinces the family to convert and change their names instead of having to leave (Ashour 141). Maryama's decision to convert in public while remaining Muslim in private also serves as the first of many instances, which shows a key ability of her character to adapt and survive through creativity and, in some cases, a bit of theatricality. Not only do they contain the "covert gestures" as Vincent Barletta calls them but they become embedded with those gestures as Arabic texts inlaid within the walls, the floors and the furniture of the houses that shelter them in physical and cultural terms.

When the Tribunal of the Inquisition asks Saleema the name of her husband, she gives them both his names: Carlos Manuel after baptism, and Saad Al-Malaqi before baptism (Granara 214). The baptism and forced conversions of Muslim bodies become ceremonies of possession. Through the parade of Columbus, Ashour creates a transatlantic connection in this discourse of possession. Within the hegemonic system of the colonizer it is a ceremony of possession which inscribes legibility onto the bodies, lands and peoples they take for the crown, the cross and the empire but the bodies written upon, it is an act of violence which erases their identity, origin, and culture all in one fatal gesture. The baptism originally intended to symbolize a discourse of rebirth and

purification becomes contradictory to its traditional form as it becomes a symbolic death for Mustafa and the entire family of Saleema.

The erasures upon the public, external spaces are subverted in private, internal spaces of the family home and clandestine practices and ceremonies. In *The Handless Maiden: Moriscos and the Politics of Religion in Early Modern Spain*, Mary Elizabeth Perry defines three specific terms of resistance: overt resistance, covert resistance, and unconscious resistance; she contrasts *conscious, active resistance* with *conscious, active accommodation* as well (Vincent xiii). Perry uses archival records from the Inquisition to discuss the case of MadalenaMorisca, who faced the tribunal of the Holy Office of Seville in 1609 when they accused her of performing the Islamic ablution by washing herself ritually on one early morning (38). The case of MadalenaMorisca initiates an important discussion on corporality in the embodiment of identity and how traditional rituals of Muslim identity had to be hidden from public spaces and relegated into the private, clandestine space of the home where women took on more of the leadership roles as male religious leaders were exiled, captured as military targets or had to escape into hiding (Perry 39).

As Granada is occupied and Castile's policy towards the local population changes, the tone of the novels portray duality between inner worlds and outer spaces. The tension between internal and external comes into play when Muslims face oppression for their beliefs from institutions of authority and have the option to resort to *taqiyya*, or "precaution," as "many Moriscos in sixteenth-century Spain...externally conformed to the dominant Christian culture while maintaining internal loyalty to Islam" (Perry 34).

Hiding their faith to survive their circumstances is an implementation of the Islamic concept of *taqiyya*. This practice of only practicing Islam through belief in one's heart is a key component of the Fatwa of Oran (1504), a key piece of Islamic legislation to understand the struggle Moriscos endured to preserve their life, home, and faith under the extreme duress of occupation. It also further emphasizes our duality of the internal and the external worlds of families who chose to secretly keep their Islamic faith like the family of Abu Jaafar. The practice of *taqiyya* increases a sense of agency for the subaltern Muslim population, which had to maintain an outer appearance of submission while committing internal measures of subversion.

Spaces which were once sites for rituals of sensory memory for individuals like Abu Jaafar become transformed into sites of violence and dominance, and both the spaces and the bodies of the Moriscos are dominated through surveillance, sanctions and physical violence by institutions such as the Inquisition and the virtual recruits who are encouraged to spy and report on *suspicious* activities. All who speak, look, dress, or act like a Muslim become suspect.

The depiction of space, internal and external, forms a key aspect of the novel within my reading as fiction becomes a metaphorical space for resistance in remembering Muslims of Granada for whom every aspect of their identity and the spaces linked to those identities, both public and private- were gradually occupied and redefined. Their homes, mosques, schools, bathhouses, businesses, and public squares were all occupied and either destroyed or erased of their original cultural meanings. The narrative of Ashour balances the representation of the external environment and inner struggles.



Moriscos were forced to keep their houses open to show that they were not engaged in crypto-Muslim practices. Public and private spaces were specifically used to make sure the inhabitants of Granada were (in mind and body) externally (and internally) conforming to the faith that had been officially mandated upon them through mass conversions and the Inquisition.

Radwa Ashour's novel constantly echoes the tensions between the public threat and the intimate danger faced by Abu Jaafar's family, which trespasses into the most private spaces. Secrecy is a constant figure in the upbringing of their children with double identities, double names because of the surveillance of the external environment. Secrecy in the home and surveillance in public overtakes the family as every aspect of Muslim identity becomes suspect, and prohibited-it becomes dangerous to partake in core aspects of communal and individual identity. In the novel, the narration consistently depicts specific internal and external gestures of religious and cultural identity and its suppression or destruction. Abu Jaafar's descendants and the community of the Albaicín resist erasures with both public and private means. There are significant scenes in which readers witness family discussions on how to address each new instance of the prohibitions placed on the citizens of Granada. The responses are varied in nature to show the complicated concerns and reactions of individuals within the community. We are privy to the hushed conversations, the public debates, the words exchanged on the street-all come together to create a sincere appreciation for the uncertainty of a community defeated but still resolute in maintaining small degrees of freedom in secret.

It is a privileged perspective that Ashour grants her readers by having them partake in dangerous secrets. The family's compulsion to keep their Muslim identity hidden and the readers' spatial omniscience to be able to see both the increasing persecution of Muslim identity in public space as well as the subversion Abu Jaafar's family performs in their private space creates a greater degree of intimacy. In the private, secret spaces Ashour narrates, they sing for Muslim weddings; they teach Arabic, perform the Muslim prayer five times a day and perform ritual ablution—the daily trappings of a Muslim's spiritual identity. This intimacy creates a compelling source of identification between the readers and Ashour's protagonists. Surveillance and persecution is the primary motivation behind the intense secrecy in the tone of the trilogy. The secrecy is at first, unifying, with a sense of solidarity, but as time progresses, the constant interplay of secrecy and surveillance is oppressive and divisive.

The novel describes visual oppression, a pain caused by sight in public spaces. A few days after witnessing a man whipped and a woman burned, Maryama is overwhelmed with sadness. She can only see the faces of the victims and grief manifests through her whole body, her posture, and her flesh. She attends the processions to hear the names and sentences recited by the officers of the Inquisition, to make sure none of her family were among them. However, every time afterward, she would be exhausted for days. The novel of Ashour shows the mob tinged with a trace of pleasure from the violence they witness. However, the family of Abu Jaafar is repeatedly horrified and defeated to a fatal measure by the public punishments they witness. The corporeality of the victims of the spectacles repeats throughout the trilogy.

When Maryama sees the accused walking barefoot, with ropes around their necks, the narration evokes a mirror image of the procession of Christopher Columbus depicted at the beginning of the first novel in the trilogy. As she peers upon the individuals condemned and punished publicly by the Inquisition, horror and sadness stir within her. Her husband Hasan has to remind her to keep up appearances. The external surveillance invades the private spaces of the family. They are being watched.<sup>70</sup>

### **Spectacles of Violence**

The spectacle is part and parcel of the creation of Otherness. In the parade of Christopher Columbus through Granada, the narrative shows, unnamed, silent, native captives from the Caribbean tread in line with flora and fauna as trophies of conquest and collection. Ashour's depiction of Columbus's parade through Granada portrays the darkness behind the colonial prowess on display, a spectacle of difference that celebrates imperial possession. Ashour narrates the procession in each successive stage of multiple enclosed species of unknown plants, insects, and vegetation. The procession builds to a climax as one of the last items marched through the crowds is glass chests filled with shimmering gold.

This glamorous encasement is purely for display but also portrays a sense of ownership or possession. Columbus has taken and transported each encased item for his monarchs, and then through the glass, the audience possesses each body, plant, and piece with their gaze. The crowd of spectators reaches a new height of excitement when,

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<sup>70</sup>(Granara 149)

finally, we see them- the inhabitants of “the new world.” In the English translation of this portion of the text, Ashour’s narrator uses the word “captives.” because, amidst the shimmering spectacle of the gold and exotic goods which enchant the gaze of the audience, our gaze catches onto the more brutal aspects of the display.

The perspective of the four young witnesses—Saleema, Saad, Hasan, and Naeem- and we see their reaction transform from awe and curiosity to immense sadness. The protagonists’ vision breaks away from the spectacle of triumphant colonial, Christian imperial expansion. The postures of the captives within the communal space of the city of Granada and lastly create a ripple effect and echoes in the bodies of captured, enslaved, tortured, persecuted, condemned and defeated bodies seen in the eyes of the family of Abu Jaafar throughout the trilogy. This moment contains detailed descriptions of the soundscape, an essential component of the imperial spectacle:

The procession went forth immersed in a cacophony of rattling tambourines and beating drums, while the whistling of flutes mixed with the roar of discharging artillery and the boisterous guffaws of the masses. But the four youngsters were dumbfounded by the fact that all the cheer that was bursting in their hearts had mysteriously disappeared. They hadn’t noticed that it had slipped away and was now replaced with a melancholy that seemed to overtake the entire parade. They watched in silence the cuffed hands behind the backs of the captives, the slow, deliberate pace, the bowed heads, and those sudden, furtive looks that stared them right in the eye whenever a captive looked at them and they at him.<sup>71</sup>

The cacophony of the procession is juxtaposed with the silence of the youngsters. We adopt the inner vision of the four youth, and now they too see the people as captives. The noise of the parade and even “the cheer that was bursting in their hearts” all

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<sup>71</sup>(Granara 29)

disappear and fall silent as they witness the bodies marching before them-the cheer gives way to deep melancholy (Granara 29).

Ashour undermines the imperial vision and criminalization of the Muslim, Arab Other, by providing intimacy with the perspective of the family of Abu Jaafar. The children identify with the captives who are staring back at them. They can read the body language of the prisoners, further juxtaposing this sense of entrapment with the artificially created ambiance of triumph and glory echoed in the instruments and artillery. The beating drums and artillery create a sonic spectacle of glory but take on a different meaning in the perception of the young onlookers. In this moment of sonic dissonance between the intended spectacle and its perception, the drums carry a foreshadowing sense of doom. They become a sonic mark of defeat and destruction. The living bodies marching along are like booty taken in war. The captives stare back, and Naeem, Saad, Saleem, and Hasan are implicated as witnesses to the underlying, darker meaning of the spectacle before them. The spectacle ruptures when their gaze meets. Amidst the chains, bondage, and degradation, one young Amerindian woman still walks with a sense of defiance and dignity.

Saleema's experience before the Tribunal is another example of the intense subjectivity of the narration, which serves to undermine the official narrative of the Inquisitors accusing Saleema of witchcraft. Readers know the accusations to be false, and this is how fiction helps problematize the alleged truthfulness of official records. While the tribunal reads out Saleema's sentence, the omniscient narrator sees Saleema look back on her own life and reframe her ending within her judgment of the past.

Saleema's death links to the burning of the books by Cardinal Cisneros.

Saleema's internal dialogue links the past burning of the books to her present when before she walks out to face her sentence. Saleema also recalls the burning of the books before her ending. The physical confinement of her physical space is subverted by the expanse of her interior narrated space. Saleema sits in confinement and rather than focusing on the accusation and sentence echoed in the words of the guard, Ashour keeps the reader with Saleema and the thoughts reflecting on her life exceed the thoughts on how her death will play out:

Saleema tries to calm herself as she sits in solitary confinement. She doesn't sleep because only with open eyes can she keep the rats away from her and repel the nightmares she cannot repel when she's sleeping, only to awaken in a seizure of terror. She lies awake wondering what it is that will give her peace of mind. The giant woman who brings her food told her she was a witch, that it was proven and declared, and like all the hundreds of other such trials conducted by the Office of Inquisition, this one would end with her being burned at the stake. She ran the scene through her mind. They would tie her up, lead her into a public square packed with curious spectators anxiously awaiting the stack of wood to be set afire, like the burning of the books...How did her grandfather Abu Jaafar bear to watch the blaze of fire as it ravaged one book after another, to see the pages curl up on themselves as if the fire were warding itself against them and continuing on its path of destruction, consuming, burning, snapping off, and turning into coal everything in its way until nothing remained but dust and ashes? And what was written in them, where did that all go? Saleema wondered. Weren't human beings inscribed sheets, stings of words having a meaning that, when put together, connote the whole that a person signifies?<sup>72</sup>

The burning of the books by Cisneros was a public massacre of Granada's greatest wealth in the eyes of Abu Jaafar. Witnessing this event triggers Abu Jaafar's death but also gives birth to Saleema's subversion in secretly preserving and smuggling Arabic texts, which she also studies and absorbs in her passion for knowledge and the

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<sup>72</sup>(Granada 223)

written word. Her death is the second violent episode, which marks the entire trilogy and ends the first novel. The fact that the first book of the trilogy, entitled *Gharnata*, ends with the death of Saleema, means the wealth of Granada has to offer in its Muslim traditions of scholarship dies with Saleema.

Before her death, the narrative immerses the reader in Saleema's contemplation of her life. Her sentence and punishment for the alleged crime of witchcraft draw light on a historical reality of marginalization, which was experienced by Muslim medical practitioners forced to become unofficial healers. The false accusations leveled against Saleema reflect the intersectionality of her marginalization as an Arab woman of Muslim heritage.

Saleema's march towards her doom is marked as a sort of grotesque spectacle as Ashour's narration pays special attention to the gaze of Saleema and the gaze set upon her in the crowd. The narrative undercuts the spectacle of violence and emphasizes the aversion of Saleema's gaze. By creating a counter-narrative, the novel redefines the sight/site of the spectacle as Saleema walks, gaze lowered, to her fate.

The crowds roared and the shouts of the masses that pounded in Saleema's head like thunderous hammers mixed with the pounding of her heart and the pounding in her stomach. She didn't want to look around her. She didn't want to look because she feared their eyes, Castilian eyes gleaming with delight and eager to watch, and Arab eyes that break your heart with their sorrowful or frightened looks. She doesn't look up, but she hears a voice that sounds like the voice of Saad. She keeps her eyes down. They unfasten some of her shackles and lead her toward the woodpile.<sup>73</sup>

This lowered gaze and the hostility she senses around her mirror the young Amerindian woman Naeem saw walking during the parade of Christopher Columbus.

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<sup>73</sup> (Granara 228)

Saleema is not only physically surrounded but also sonically trapped by the scene and her onlookers. Saleema walks on like a lamb for slaughter, but Ashour never fully allows the vision of the narrative to perceive her as such.

This scene echoes the disenchantment of the spectacle when the children saw the bodies of the Amerindians passing before them as paraded possessions on the way to Barcelona to be presented to Ferdinand and Isabel by Columbus. Just like the unnamed Indian girl in the white dress, Saleema refuses to participate in the spectacle. Rather than looking back in fear, or looking for solace, she looks down. She already knows what she will see, and as discussed earlier, she has already played the scene out in her mind. Arab eyes convey sorrow and fear, a true sense of terror because they empathize with Saleema.

Ashour's description creates an intimacy with Saleema's perception and experience of this moment where she walks to her death. We know she does not see those eyes because "she doesn't look up, but she hears a voice that sounds like the voice of Saad" (Granara 228). Beyond Saleema's realm of experience, Ashour's narration specifically mentions the public gaze. Saleema maintains her gaze on the ground as the sounds of the crowd surround her. The reader knows Saad is present in the crowd and that he has most likely managed to make his voice heard as he calls out for Saleema, but Saleema does not know. Instead, she can only guess that his voice might be part of her imagination as well. She might have desired to look upon her husband one last time and brave the eyes of all the others if she had known he were there.

The reader does not see the flames, and the writing does not describe the physical death of Saleema as the first part of the trilogy nears the end. Instead of forcing the reader



to participate in the spectacle of violence, rather we immediately transition to Maryama. The reader knows what is taking place in Bib Rambla square, but Maryama is at home telling a story to placate the child whose mother is being burned alive at the same moment. Ashour protects the dignity of Saleema's death and shields the readers from the real event by presenting only Saleema's conception of her life and death.

The only narrative the reader receives is Saleema's internal iteration of the conception of her life and her identity. Ashour begins and ends the first book in the trilogy with a woman's body walking towards her death. In the first instance, the woman is silent, and we do not even know her name. The first woman who is naked and unnamed as she drowns in the river is seen as an omen to Abu Jaafar, and to the reader, it is foreshadowing a repetition of violence to be seen in the rest of the novels. In the ending moments of the first book, we see every thought that goes through Saleema's mind, and we have unlimited access to her inner life before the end of the words, and the narrative turns away from Saleema's death sentence and turns us towards Maryama telling Aysha a story. Nozad Heshmat Kasem takes note of the author's choice to end the narrative with the voice of Maryama telling a story to Saleema's daughter Aysha, shielding the reader from having to witness Saleema's final moments much like Maryama trying to soothe and distract Saleema's daughter.<sup>74</sup>

Instead of finishing the novel with the scene of the death of Saleema in the fire, which is already anticipated with Saleema imagines it alone in her cell, the author prefers to close the first novel of the trilogy with a story that Maryama tells to

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<sup>74</sup>Kasem, Nozad Heshmat. "El "Otro" en "Granada [trilogía]" de Radwa Ashur." *Revista Káñina* 39.2 (2015): 73-89. Print.

Aysha, or Esperanza as her uncle Hasan is accustomed to calling the daughter of Aysha; she does this to overcome her pain and to entertain the child.<sup>75</sup>

The novel begins with a woman's body silent and alone and ends with the image of a woman telling a story to her niece. The novel ends with a woman's body silently approaching her doom but also subverts the silence through the interior text of Saleema and the orality of Maryama. The ending of the novel is another gesture of subversion when the ending of Saleema is not the last line of the novel. The novel ends with the beginning of a story instead. Maryama begins to tell Aysha the story of a tree in heaven. It sounds very similar to the tree of life, but this is a tree in Paradise, which blooms with a special flower every year during the night of power (the Night of Power is one of the last ten nights of Ramadan and it is believed the Quran was first revealed during this night).

### **Seeing through Silence**

It is just as important to show the characters' weaknesses and flaws, in addition to their strength and resilience. Defeat and disappointment form key aspects of the emotional realism of the trilogy. Rather than creating a narrative that indulges in idealism, inspiration, and resistance, Ashour explores the depths of negative space of this subjective experience of Abu Jaafar's family in this historical period. After the signing of the Capitulations of 1491, Abu Jaafar struggles to cope with occupation and defeat.

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<sup>75</sup>En vez de terminar la novela con la escena de la muerte de Salima en la hoguera, que ya la ha anticipado cuando Salima se la imaginaba a solas en la celda, la autora prefirió cerrar la primera novela de la Trilogía con un cuento que Mariama cuenta a Aixa, o Esperanza como se la llama. (Kasem 84) (The translation from Spanish to English is my own.)

Ashour adds nuance by showing how, faced with the insurmountable realities which were closing in on them, the people of Granada were only human. The internal strength of Abu Jaafar is crumbled, and he is deeply overwhelmed. Abu Jaafar's interiority shows the reader that the circumstances of conquest and occupation are unnatural and disturbing. This dynamic provides a direct opposition to the naturalization of conquest in Aronofsky's film, where colonial domination is in the background of the film's aesthetic presentation.

Radwa Ashour expands the historical moment of erasure using narrative fiction and reminds readers how Muslim presence on the peninsula did not end in 1492. Her writing exploits a key advantage of fiction, the "power to expand and contract perception." Through her novels, we navigate a circulating narrative of experiences and memories to show us what it meant for those who were set aside within the big picture of "Western" historical narratives, and also what it just *might have* been like for them as they had to live through it. In the *Thulaythiyyat Gharnata*, Ashour helps us break away from some of the blind spots, the superficial light and shadows reinforced through *Orientalist* tropes in *The Fountain*. Through fiction, Ashour guides readers into the most intimate spaces of the inner worlds closed to historiography (except in testimony and diaries). Though Aronofsky's is a visual text, Ashour also creates a vision mediated in narrative via her fiction, which contrasts with the imagery of *The Fountain*.

Rather than reinforcing tropes of imperial ideology and the imperial imagination, Ashour uses language to fill the empty spaces of past erasures with the reimagined stories and the voices which once resounded within those spaces. Radwa Ashour returns our

gaze to the people before their stories turn to shadows. We gain an intimate vision of the experiences of conquest, occupation, forced assimilation, and expulsion- and most importantly, Ashour remembers the many ways in which individuals and communities manifested resistance, subversion, and negotiation of these erasures.

### Chapter 3: The Departure and The Return in Radwa Ashour's Trilogy

The first novel, *Granada*, gives readers an intimate perspective of the family of Abu Jaafar when the Castilian policy in Granada targets the Muslim, Arab community in the conquered kingdom of Granada. The reader observes how the Catholic Monarchs had promised to respect the identities of the conquered Muslim communities, and then how each Castilian policy begins targeting the community and eventually forcing them to convert. Ashour gave readers an intimate perspective on how Castilian occupation is protested in public and subverted in private.

While the first novel focuses on the experience of occupation, the novels *Moraima* and *La Partida* focus on the experiences of diaspora and displacement. The four remaining members of the family of Abu Jaafar, which figure most dominantly, are his grandson Hasan, Hasan's wife Maryama, Hasan, and Maryama's grandson Ali, and the adopted apprentice of Abu Jaafar, Naeem. Naeem returns from his travels to colonial America. In the second and third part of the trilogy, Ashour includes the intertextual incorporation of key historical events and documents which mark the Morisco experience in sixteenth-century Spain: Francisco Núñez Muley's *Memorial* (1566), which petitioned on behalf of the Moriscos of Granada to maintain their cultural practices while affirming their Christian and Spanish identities, the second Alpujarras Rebellion (1568-

1570), the forced relocation of the people of Granada to other kingdoms of Castile (1571), and the final Edict of Expulsion (1609).<sup>76</sup>

The second book of the trilogy begins around 1561,<sup>77</sup> approximately seven years before the second Alpujarras Rebellion, and more than three decades after the death of Saleema, which occurred at the end of the first book. *Maryama* (*Moraimain* in the Spanish version of the text) is the only book in the trilogy named for one of the characters, as Maryama's subjective experiences, stories, and dreams form the major framework for the majority of the novel. Her memories, her engagement with the spaces and people around her, and her stories dominate the perspective of the novel, which depicts a more intensely enforced cultural hegemony by the Holy Office of the Inquisition and Castilian edicts against the Morisco community. The novel starts with a vision Maryama recounts to a woman who interprets dreams and provides talismans for protection, OmYúsef.<sup>78</sup>

Maryama sees a stag standing in front of the moon. Shortly after her vision, the readers see Ali announce the arrival of a strange-looking man he does not recognize. The stranger is Naeem returning to the house in Granada. Ali soon grows fond of his newfound friend, but Granada is not the same for Naeem. Hasan informs Naeem of Saleema's death, and how Saad passed away soon after witnessing the public execution of his wife. Naeem continues to stay with Maryama, Hasan, and Ali, but after they ask

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<sup>76</sup>Perry, Mary Elizabeth. *The Handless Maiden: Moriscos and the Politics of Religion in Early Modern Spain*. Princeton University Press, 2005. Print.

<sup>77</sup>I made this calculation based on the time elapsed between Maryama's vision and her interpretation of the vision coming to fruition through the second Alpujarras Rebellion.

<sup>78</sup>Maryama visits the woman despite Hasan's objections since astrology and fortune telling are strictly forbidden in the Islamic faith.

him if he got married, he mysteriously responds that he left his wife and children when he came to Granada without further explanation. It was in the first book of the trilogy where the reader first saw how Naeem met and fell in love with Maya when he was working for father Miguel. The second novel of the trilogy shows a flashback in Naeem's memory where Naeem's wife, Maya, and their unborn child die while they are chased by Castilians and their hounds in New Spain. After returning to Granada, Naeem talks to his wife and unborn children while staring at the moon at night. Both Hasan and Naeem pass away in the house in the Albaicín.

Maryama survives and buries both Hasan and Naeem in the novel. When Ali grows older, he works in an artisan's workshop to take care of his grandmother. However, after the second Alpujarras rebellion is defeated, Maryama dies during the forced resettlement of the Moriscos of Granada, and after her death, Ali escapes and is lost until he takes up with a man named Roberto and his group of bandits linked to Aben Humeya, the leader of the second Alpujarras rebellion. Ali leaves Roberto and returns to the house in the Albaicín, which has been seized by his childhood companion José Benamar (even though Ali still possesses the original deed for the house in Arabic).

Ali is forced to rent his own house and work in Benamar's shop, but he revives the house to what it was like when he lived there with his grandparents. Ali reenacts what Maryama used to do when she used to take care of the house. He revives his memory of his grandmother by replanting her orchard in the courtyard, but soon he is seized by officers of the Inquisition who were secretly surveilling him since his return to Granada. After the Holy Office imprisons Ali for his past associations with Roberto and his

family's other associations with Morisco rebels, Benamar makes Granada dangerous for Ali by falsely accusing him of heresy. Ali is forced to leave behind the house in Albaicín for the last and final time. Before he leaves, he buries Maryama's marriage chest, or *sundug*, in the orchard he replanted. The second book of the trilogy ends with this last look back at the house of the family of Abu Jaafar in the Albaicín, which Ali and the readers never see again except in Ali's dreams.

Ashour uses images of water and nature to reflect the emotional states of her characters within the trilogy. While the first book used Ibn Tufayl's philosophical novel to echo constant parallels with Saleema's life and the image of the gazelle to show her as an embodiment of indigenous written culture and knowledge, the presentation of animals and nature in this part of the trilogy conveys the experience of oppression and occupation as Maryama and Naeem both identify with images of animals trapped and hunted. Ashour uses the image of the stag, the moon, and the *sundug* (a chest or box containing valuables, documents, or other stores of memory) to create subjective narratives of this history of conquest, occupation, displacement, and exile.

The third book starts with Ali traveling alone in the direction of Valencia, where he hopes to find his aunts who had originally moved there after marriage. On the road to Valencia, he finds out all of his aunts and their families abandoned the peninsula, but he is convinced to stay on as an Arabic teacher in the country village of Alyafería, which is filled with crypto-Muslims like him. Amidst Castilian forced relocation and expulsion of the Granadan Moriscos, the official narrative represented in the title of the last novel, *La Partida*, translated as "the departure," is subverted with an ambiguous ending when the



last descendant of Abu Jaafar seen in the trilogy, Ali, does not comply with the edict of expulsion. Rather than departing, Ali turns away from the shore. The title of the third book follows the pattern of the entire trilogy in subverting Castilian narratives, and rather than departing from the Iberian Peninsula, Ali departs from the shore to return to the country where his family has lived and died. This ending creates subversion through ambiguity.

### **On Translation**

Only the first novel of Ashour's trilogy, *Granada*, has been translated into English by William Granara. All three novels of the trilogy were translated into Spanish by María Luz Comendador. All the translations in this chapter will be my own, but the Spanish translation will be in the footnotes. For any new characters or places mentioned, I will use the spelling of their name used in the Spanish translation. However, for characters already introduced in the discussion from Chapter 2, I will be using the same spelling from William Granara's English translation of the first novel. For example, I will still use the name "Maryama" from the English translation instead of the name "Moraima" from the Spanish version. The English translation is closer to the sound of the name in Arabic letters. The title of the third novel in the trilogy in Arabic is (رحيل) *Ar-Raheel* which was translated as *La Partida*, "The Departure."

Firstly, translation plays a major role in this project because it provides readers with other linguistic contexts access to the text. If it were not for translation, I would not

have had access to Ashour's full trilogy, because though I could not read the trilogy in the original source text of Ashour's Arabic, I was able to read the entire arch of Abu Jaafar's family in the Spanish translation of María Luz Comendador. On August 26, 2016, I purchased the Spanish translation from a university bookstore in Granada, Spain. I spent a week touring the city by myself after completing a summer abroad program in Madrid and Gijón. When I started the trilogy and read the passages which drew out the human experience of space, like the moment Abu Jaafar is walking along the river Darro, I was delighted to recall my experiences walking around the same spaces, albeit greatly changed with time.

I conceive translation as an exercise in balance between distance and proximity. While the Spanish language afforded me the opportunity of proximity to approach and understand the story of the family of Abu Jaafar, there is an inherent distance since my lack of knowledge in Arabic does not allow me to access the original language of Ashour's trilogy. Because of my ability to read the Quran, I can identify the names of characters and places in the original Arabic text, and the references to the Quranic chapters, but I am unable to reach the original writing of Ashour.

In Ashour's text, the intertextuality of the Qur'an and other poetic forms in Arabic make it clear that every translation will always possess a distance from the original text, from the original Arabic. The reader can see the value of Abu Jaafar's determination to continue to have Hasan learn Arabic despite the discouragement he received from his neighbors repeatedly telling him that "Spanish is the language of the future" (Granara 35).

In addition to an inherent distance between translator and text, there is always a danger involved. Ultimately, a translator is a devoted reader. “Translation is the most intimate act of reading,” and according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay, “without a sense of the rhetoricity of language, a species of neocolonialist construction of the non-western is afoot” (313-314). I am a reader of Ashour’s devoted readers—her translators, but the danger Spivak has described always loomed in my mind. What kind of results would I yield in my English translation of a Spanish translation of an Arabic text? My individual identity as a Muslim woman does nothing to bridge the distance between my English and the Egyptian Arabic of the original trilogy. For me, translating a translation was a necessary evil, and a worthy pursuit, in order to make the text accessible in my exploration of Ashour’s storytelling.

Throughout the trilogy, it is clear that the family of Abu Jaafar maintains an intimate relationship to the Arabic language, and is not as familiar with Castilian. In the second and third books, Hasan benefits from his acquired/learned knowledge of written Arabic, a rare and valued knowledge among the Moriscos of the novel by the mid-sixteenth century and then pass this cultural inheritance on to his grandson, Ali in secret by writing and translating the Castilian alphabet “A, B, C in one column upon a writing surface and writing the Arabic alphabet starting with *alif*, *baa*, *taain* the second column (320 Comendador). When Saleema is listening to the list of accusations posed against her as she stands in front of the tribunal, she strains to listen very carefully as they are read aloud in Castilian. When a group of soldiers raid her house, Maryama struggles to voice her protests in Castilian. When Ali ventures outside of Granada, he is exposed to some of

the linguistic diversity of the peninsula. The imam of the village where he stays gives the examples of Aragon and Valencia as two divergent cases of the spectrum of Morisco identities, including their linguistic identities.

### **The Return**

The second and third parts of the trilogy take place during the forced diaspora of the Granadans to other parts of Castile and end with the Edict of Expulsion. Ashour fills the last parts of the trilogy with gestures of return, which demonstrate a source of resistance in space and memory. In the first two chapters of the second book, Maryama's vision and perceptions dominate the narration. Maryama's mind is just as inquisitive and sharp as Saleema. Ashour paints her female characters with variety and depth. (But at this point we do not know why Aysha left.) Ashour zooms in on some and leaves others with a more superficial presence, but a meaningful existence all the same. Maryama's mind is disturbed and awakened by her imagination.

A desire for witnessing the return of her children shapes every action and motivation in Maryama's story in this part of the trilogy. Departures cause internal fragmentation for Maryama. The departure of her niece Aysha has scarred Maryama internally at this point in the trilogy, and she can never be the same again. Her daughters were married and then moved to Valencia. Her son, Hicham, left the house after arguing with his father, Hasan. This series of departures has taken its toll on Maryama. And so, her greatest desire is her children's return, even though she knows it is impossible.

Maryama is filled with hope and her perception of the people around her, including the visions of people no longer with her, are all centered on images of her family returning to the house in the Albaicín, of Saleema returning to announce Naeem's arrival, of Naeem's return, and the return of Granada to being more like what it used to be (Comendador 296). She revives the orchard in the house and the flowers and plants. When Ashour tells us how Maryama decorates the space and her person (almond oil and kohl), it is another gesture of return when she revives the space itself and returns to her daily care and beauty routines (Comendador 297). The return of Naeem stirs more questions than answers within the mind of Maryama (Comendador 302).

Ashour's fiction enters the most intimate conceptions of space within the minds of the characters, and storytelling is one medium through which these conceptions are portrayed. Ashour describes in detail the effect of the stories upon Ali. They feed his imagination, and it is in this moment when Ashour's novel reaches a meta-commentary on the effects of stories on the listener, and the emotions, sensations, and memories associated with them. This moment is also a significant connection to the erasures of the historical imagination on silenced, occupied bodies. It is not just the people, but the places as well, which have a story to tell.

Ali loved the endless stories of his grandmother. Every person had a history—every place, a story. The horse had a legend about its origin, as well as the bird that plowed through the sky. In the story, Granada had a friend named Genil, who would envelop her within an embrace to go with the days and nights, who amused her with the tale of a journey after arriving to greet Granada after traveling from afar. The account Genil would relate was entertaining, and emotional; words and songs merged within his tale. Malaga was a princess reigning from high up in a castle as she looked upon the sea. From the other side of the sea, a suitor lay in wait, but she could not reach him despite her desire, so she would sing as she waited for him. Alhama was a young girl without a family, uprooted and lost in

the mountains, weeping alone in silence. In the night, she would call out, and her voice echoed through the hills and valleys. One kind man would hear her, and would ask aloud: Who is calling? And she would respond: I am Alhama. The man would stop the donkey, and go towards the place where the voice was coming from, but he would get lost. He would retrace his steps and try again.<sup>79</sup>

Spaces tell stories. Here Maryama's personification of cities, rivers, and the Kaaba differ with the sexualization of conquered territories in the rhetoric of conquest. The spaces speak and act with agency in the stories she tells Ali. The imperial vision which views colonized spaces with silence, and the image of an Edenic fertile space, open wide and empty ready to be taken and settled. Maryama projects her imagination upon space, but her relationship to the spaces in her narration is unique from the tropes of the imperial imagination seen in *The Fountain*. Space is not an empty canvas because she

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<sup>79</sup> A Ali le encantaban los inagotables cuentos de su abuela. Cada persona tenía una historia; cada lugar, un cuento. El caballo tenía una leyenda sobre su origen, y también el pájaro que surcaba el cielo. En el cuento, Granada tenía un amigo llamado Genil, que la envolvía en un abrazo que acompañaba sus días y sus noches, que la entretenía con el relato de su viaje, porque había llegado hasta ella desde lejos. Lo que Genil le contaba era divertido, emocionante; se mezclaban en su relato las palabras con las canciones. Málaga era una princesa dueña de un alto castillo que se asomaba al mar. Desde el otro lado del mar, la llamaba un pretendiente hasta el que no podía llegar a pesar de su afán, y al que esperaba cantando. Alhama era una muchacha sin familia, desarraigada y perdida en medio de la sierra, que lloraba en silencio su soledad. Por la noche llamaba, y su voz resonaba por cerros y valles. Un buen hombre, al escucharla, preguntaba: "¿Quién está llamando?". Y ella respondía: "Soy Alhama". El hombre detenía el burro, iba hacia el lugar de donde procedía la voz, pero se perdía. Volvía sobre sus pasos y lo intentaba de nuevo. (Comendador 314)

All of the translated sections of Ashour's trilogy which come from the Spanish translation of María Luz Comendador from the original Arabic text have been translated into English by me. Hence, per MLA guidelines, this translation has been noted in this footnote so that it may be understood that all the citations from Comendador will be *translations* without having to repeat the information in the citation. The Spanish citation will be in footnotes. The sections of the trilogy which I translate are only the textual passages from the second book, *Maryama*, and the third book, *La Partida*, which is pg. 293 to 569 of Comendador's translation and it spans approximately the period from 1563 to 1609.

is describing her home, and she is trying to transmit the same affection she has for her home to her grandson. Naeem, Maryama, and Hasan were all Ali's storytellers. Ashour focuses on Ali's experience of the stories that fill Ali's imagination and his memories with images, with the voices of his elders and with specific scents as well. Sights and sounds are not the only senses Ashour uses to portray the depths of Ali's loss.

Naeem also would tell him things. The stories of his grandmother were impregnated with the scent of the lavender, which she used to keep between the folded clothing in her closet. The stories of Naeem would mix with the smoke of the pipe. When his words started to flow, Ali would remain seated at his side, and he would forget about running around through the neighborhood, and about his hunger and his thirst. And he would lose sense of all else until a warm liquid started running down his lower body and wetting his seat and his clothes.<sup>80</sup>

Naeem lives in the memory of Ali through his stories. This exercise expands the space he occupies in memory and space. Ashour's imagery communicates the significance of storytelling and the meaningful attachments to space- linking them both throughout the trilogy. Ashour renovates the lived spaces of Granada through language the same way Maryama and Ali, revive a collective memory and cultural framework in the constructed and natural spaces they narrate in their stories. Ashour contrasts these moments where language shows readers how the characters engage with their spaces with moments that show the absence and emptiness imposed on spaces where communities have disappeared and taken those spatially anchored meanings, stories, and cultural

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<sup>80</sup> Naím también le contaba cosas. Las historias de la abuela estaban impregnadas del olor a la alhucema que ella guardaba entre la ropa doblada en el armario. Las de Naím se mezclaban con el humo de la pipa. Fumaba y, mientras narraba, iba exhalando nubes de humo. Cuando él tomaba la palabra, Ali se quedaba sentado a su vera, se olvidaba de corretear por el barro, del hambre y de la sed. Y no se daba cuenta de nada hasta que un líquido calentito le corría de repente muslos abajo y le mojaba el asiento y la ropa. (Comendador 314)

frameworks with them. Ashour's trilogy shows how, like the characters, we can never really return to Granada as it was—except in fiction, in stories.

### ***Granada Hundida, A Sunken City***

As discussed in the previous chapter, Ashour shows how someone's psyche forms an intimate attachment to space as to someone much beloved, like a family member. The narrator adopts the personification of Granada as it transforms through the experience of each individual. When Naeem returns to the city from his travels and tragedy experienced in the colonial expansion on the continent, he returns to his family in Granada after losing his family in America. However, his hopes to alleviate the pain he carries after losing his wife, and the unborn child meets with space which is strange and changed—like Naeem, Granada is no longer the same:

Naeem thought that returning would alleviate his pain. That was why he came back, but he did not find Granada in Granada, nor did he find the Albaicín in the Albaicín. He arrived to the city in the afternoon and walked along the Road of the River Darro. He recognized the river's course, its water, its bridges, the Alhambra looming over it, but not the new palaces or the churches erected along its banks. Was he lost? He asked himself. No, he was not lost, rather his mind held onto the memory of a place that was now another.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Naím pensó que regresar aliviaría su dolor. Por eso volvió, pero no encontró en Granada a Granada, ni en el Albaicín al Albaicín. Llegó a la ciudad por la tarde y caminó por la Carrera del Darro. Conocía a su cauce, su agua, sus puentes, la Alhambra que se asomaba a él, pero no aquellos palacios nuevos ni las iglesias erigidas a su vera. ¿Se habría perdido? Preguntó. No, no es que se hubiera perdido, es que la memoria guardaba el recuerdo de un lugar que ya era otro. (Comendador 305)



We do not see the death of Saleema, nor do we see the death of Naeem's wife. In that way, the narrative maintains a sense of dignity for the characters who lose their lives because, rather than recreating the spectacles of violence, the novel focuses on Saleema's conception of her life and death according to her personal narrative—her innermost thoughts. Still, the novel does not shy from showing the scars and the after-effects of the horror of the trauma and violence. These scars or traces are still manifested in the physical space just as they manifest in the psyches of the characters themselves. The entire trilogy is a story of what might have happened *after* the defeat since the very first human being the reader sees through the eyes of Abu Jaafar.

The woman Abu Jaafar sees drowns and dies after losing her home and her family, but rather than seeing how the woman came there, Ashour places the reader squarely in the position of witnessing what she is *after* the violence. She wanders without direction. She never speaks her name. She never speaks, and she never stops to orient herself in time and space. She is important because we will never be able to know her story. All we can do is see how she has been marked by certain violence with questions that remain unanswered. Why is she naked? What happened to her? Where are her clothes? It is a shuddering and disturbing thought to even imagine it. The nakedness of the woman represents the stripping of her sense of self. When she drowns, the readers see Granada drown as well.

This imagery of Granada sinking continues through the trilogy and is shown in the story of Naeem when suspicion and constant surveillance ruin his efforts to resettle himself among the community of Granada. Naeem secretly revives the art which was

taught to him by Abu Jaafar when he agrees to help bind and preserve some Arabic writings from various sources so that the owner can more easily hide them away or transport them secretly for others to read later on (Comendador 345). Because of the prohibition on all Arabic writings, the owner begs Naeem to keep the task a secret. After Hasan finds out of Naeem's secret favor and agrees to help him ornament the title of the collection of writings, he warns Naeem to watch his back so that he does not fall into the snare of the Tribunal.<sup>82</sup> The owner of the manuscript is taken away by the Inquisition and released after two months, and after receiving 200 lashes.<sup>83</sup> Naeem did not reveal the secret, but the owner still blames him, and the community shuns Naeem like a disease because of the perceived betrayal.

The Arabic manuscript, instead of a beacon of hope and resistance within a community buried and boxed in by the pressures of the hegemonic authorities of Church and State becomes the object which Ashour uses to show how the shadow of surveillance, suspicion, and secrecy causes a severing of social bonds which are also essential to survival. Naeem loses the one social connection he had made besides Hasan, Maryama, and Ali. This episode harbors an intense sense of alienation for Naeem, who then remembers his loss of the other home he had made for himself across the ocean. And so, even after returning to the home that Abu Jaafar and Um Jaafar had created for him in Granada, the conditions he finds in Granada cause him to feel more affinity for the

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<sup>82</sup> "...ándate con ojo cuando se lo devuelvas a su dueño, no vayas a caer en una trampa del Tribunal." (Comendador 346)

<sup>83</sup>(Comendador 347)

community he had grown to be a part of with Maya. Naeem realizes Granada is not the same, and the Granada he knew and loved no longer exists.

To them and to Granada itself. Why had he returned? If he did not know anyone else but a man and his wife...And Maryama seemed even more small-minded than her husband. They were not his people. His people were on the other side of the ocean; they loved him and did not doubt him. The next day he should embark on the next ship to set sail, and he would return to his land. There he would find Maya, and his children, and his own, good people. How could it have occurred to him to come here and live like a stranger among strangers? He would leave, and upon arriving, he would find a wife like Maya, who would marry him, and would give him many children. His wife would weave him a new garment...As soon as he chose the day, he would abandon this sunken city of Granada in or go to Malaga or Almeria, and there he would board a ship...in order to return and be with Maya and his son Hilal.<sup>84</sup>

Naeem's arrival to Granada after his journey back from America has only increased his feeling of displacement as he comes to see himself as a *stranger among strangers*. The emotional distance between Naeem and Granada is emphasized within this passage and links to a desire to create real, physical distance and to set sail and return to where he buried his wife and unborn child. He realizes he has not truly returned home; he can never return home. Home for Naeem will eternally be the place he left behind him—the place where he left his wife, Maya.

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<sup>84</sup>A ellos y a Granada entera. ¿Por qué habría vuelto? Si no conocía allí más que a un hombre y a su mujer...Y Moraima era aún más mezquina que su marido. No eran su gente. Los suyos estaban al otro lado del océano, lo querían y no dudaban de él. Al día siguiente embarcaría en el primer navío que zarpase y volvería a su tierra. Allí encontraría a Maya, a sus hijos y a su buena gente. ¿Cómo se le habría ocurrido venir aquí a vivir como un extraño entre extraños? Se iría y, al llegar, encontraría a una mujer que se pareciese a Maya, con la que se casaría, y que le daría muchos hijos. Su mujer tejería para él un traje nuevo [...] En cuanto apuntara el día abandonaría aquella Granada hundida para ir a Málaga o a Almería y allí embarcarse [...] para volver junto a Maya y su hijo Hilal. (Comendador 348)

The Granada Naeem tells Maya and Ali about through his memory is gone. In the passage above, Naeem describes the city as *Granada hundida*, sunken Granada. Granada loses its identity, and in Naeem's language, there is a deep disconnect and disenchantment in his relationship to space itself. The imagery of water discussed in the first book of the trilogy carries forth in the second and third books in a different manner. It is a metaphorical flood of *desgracias*(misfortunes)experienced by the community. Because of the doubts and fears raised by the Inquisition's persecution of *false* Christians, Granada becomes drowned in suspicions as well.

### **The Painting of Predator and Prey**

Animals and plants-nonhuman life is a source of inspiration, companionship, and empathy within Ashour's trilogy. Nature forms a foundational source of insight or parallels for many of the character's internal articulations and emotional conditions. Ashour uses animal imagery many times to describe specific character traits. Ashour's incorporation of the nonhuman elements alongside the human experiences of occupation and diaspora helps pave a new literary perspective in the representation of nature in world literature. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ashour's work cites directly from Andalusian Islamic texts as well as the Qur'an itself when showing the inspiration for the intellectual vigor of Saleema and the resistance in the first Alpujarras Revolts. Nature is a constant influencer to the Islamic intellectual tradition. Natural metaphors and analogies color the cognition of several characters in Ashour's trilogy.

The novel establishes an alliance between the alterity of Moriscos in Granada and nature. The perception of Ashour's character reads occupation, conversion, and surveillance, like the experience of being hunted. The characters feel exploited, preyed upon, and destroyed for the sake of imperial expansion and profit. Rather than presenting a romanticized image of an Edenic landscape, nature has a voice, and the nonhuman elements of space are sentient, with the ability to feel and experience emotions like fear and hope. In the first novel, Saleema loves the gazelle as if it were her child. For Saleema, her gazelle was a source of love and inspiration.

The ending of the first novel ends with Maryama telling a story to her niece, Aysha, about a tree in paradise, and the beginning of the second novel continues with the voice of Maryama again evoking an image of nature. This time, rather than a distraction or story of hope, the image is a dream, and Maryama is anxious to understand what it means. A moon and a stag make up the scene drawn before us. Maryama is recounting her dream to Om Yúsef, a local woman who interprets dreams and star signs:

Maryama said: I saw it a little after sunset. I thought it was the moon as it was so large and luminous. Later I made out the moon on the other side, and it startled me. Later on, when I fell asleep, I saw it again, although in the dream it was bigger. Copper-colored and burning brightly, it was rising above the hill. High up, there was a stag with its head crowned with branched antlers. The animal was still as if it were carved into the boulders of the summit it was treading. Then I woke up.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Moraima dijo: "Lo vi poco después del anochecer. Pensé que era la luna por lo grande y luminoso. Luego distinguí la luna por el otro lado y me extrañó. Más tarde, cuando me dormí, volví a verlo, aunque en el sueño era mayor. Cobrizo y encendido, se elevaba por encima del monte. En lo alto había un ciervo con la cabeza coronada de cuernos enramados. El animal estaba quieto, como tallado en las rocas de la cima que pisaba. Luego me desperté". (Comendador 293)

Ashour uses the imaginations and visions of characters to communicate deeper meanings and significance in a visual format. For the character of Naeem, the moon is the imagery that connects to his story of love and loss. In the vision of Maryama, which begins the second novel of the trilogy, the stag represents Naeem, and the moon represents the loss of Maya. After her death, Naeem personifies and talks to the moon as if it were Maya's caretaker. The phases of the moon connect to the three unborn children of Naeem and Maya.

When he is twenty-two years old and searching for a wife, his attempts to find a suitable match repeatedly fail, first when one woman's family decides to leave Granada, and then when another family converts to Christianity to make their lives easier after the occupation. Unwilling to convert to Christianity or leave Granada at that moment, Naeem resigns himself to the belief that he would never find a wife, but Umm Jaafar is the one who tries to help him and says to him "Leave it to me, as I will find you a wife more beautiful than the full moon" (Comendador 119).<sup>86</sup> Later on, Naeem finds Maya, and Naeem and his wife first make love in the moonlight (Comendador 244-245). The moon becomes his companion and a reminder of Maya (Comendador 305, 308).

The narration of Naeem's memory and perception personifies the sun and the moon with stark contrast because of Naeem's experience of the death of Maya and his unborn child in the American continent, in New Spain. The novel shows a flashback of this event. Naeem and Maya are running away from a group of Castilians who are chasing them with their hounds. Within the description of the event, the moon and sun

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<sup>86</sup> "Déjame a mí, que te voy a buscar una moza más bonita que la luna llena." (Comendador 119)

are both personified, and when the moon is gone, the sun dominates, destroys and sets fire to the earth in the mind's eye of Naeem's memory as if the sun is the leader of the pack –the one who is leading the dogs on to attack Maya, Naeem, and their unborn child (Comendador 306). The personification of the sun is a “rabid dog,” and the moon is “guardian of travelers, loyal and good-natured, who invites people to go away alone with her” and after he returns to Granada, the novel shows him contemplating and greeting the moon (Comendador 307-308). Within the flashback, readers relive the death of Maya and Hilal through Naeem's interiority-within his memory of the trauma. Within Naeem's subjective memory, the sun and moon become witnesses, allies, and accomplices. The moon is his ally and friend who becomes Maya's caretaker in Ali's imagination. After returning to Granada, he speaks to the moon and asks after his wife.

The moon appears linked to Naeem's search for love in his life in the first book of the trilogy as well. Before Naeem ever sets his eyes on Maya, Umm Jaafar said she would find him a wife who was more beautiful than the moon itself. Then, after traveling to the American continent with father Miguel and meeting his wife, Naeem and Maya first made love under the moonlight. After he returns to Granada after having lost Maya, Naeem talks to the moon and asks about his wife. In the description of his wife's death, the moon is an ally and witness of their love, a caretaker of his and Maya's bond. In contrast, the sun and its heat are oppressive and serve as parts of the sense of doom, lighting the landscape made harsh under its gaze, as the hunting party closes in on Naeem and Maya with the aid of their hounds.

The moon is significant in the Islamic conception of time and space. Firstly, there is a chapter in the Quran named for the moon. Secondly, the Islamic calendar is lunar, and after the sun sets, the days of Islamic months like Ramadan and Shaaban being with the appearance of the moon. The phases of the month are signs of the passage of each month, and Muslims look to the moon to count the days of auspicious months and celebrations. Moon sightings became a marker of difference and a criminalized behavior after the forced conversions of Muslims in Spain.<sup>87</sup> The moon is a key natural and spatial presence in the Muslim identity, and it shapes conception of time, orientation in space, and the Islamic spiritual and cultural imagination.

Naeem had named his three unborn children (the children he hoped to have) before the death of his pregnant wife. Naming his children makes the loss an even more violent one, but it also makes it easier for him to revisit that past and to mourn for that future never realized for himself and Maya. When Naeem names the unborn children, he names three futures lost. Ashour adds layers of the real and the unreal by symbolically containing Naeem's imagined future for himself and Maya, the dreams of his life with his wife and children within those names: Hilal, Badr, and Qamar. What is also significant is the way Ashour layers absence upon absence to the real and fictional loss evoked in the story of Naeem. In contrast to Naeem, Hasan and Maryama see their five daughters and son grow up to get married and have children of their own, even though the distance between Valencia and Granada separates the daughters and their parents.

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<sup>87</sup>García-Arenal Mercedes, and Bunes Miguel Ángel de. *Los Moriscos*. Universidad De Granada, 1996.Print.



Ashour shows the effects of the occupation and erasures of the historical macrocosm within the microcosm of a family, which becomes more and more fragmented. With occupation and increasing restrictions upon the Muslims of Granada, every relationship becomes fragmented to some degree. These ruptures include the relationships of children with their parents. Hasan and Maryama's son, Hicham, becomes estranged from his father but still comes to visit every few years to see his son Ali.<sup>88</sup> The story of Naeem is a traumatic story of loss Ashour brings to the forefront within the narrative. His story shows how the family unit is the temporal anchor of the individual. Naeem anchors his past, present, and future in his relationships. Abu Jaafar of how Ashour uses images of nature to frame the characters' sense of time and loss. Like a tree, Naeem had hope of his family growing and flourishing in America, but this hope is violently uprooted.

Naeem and Maya's story cuts deeper than the image of scattered branches to the image of a family destroyed and completely uprooted when a future full of happiness is just within view, but then completely dashed. The loss of their unborn children is an abrupt and intensely disturbing event because it destroys a *future* existence, not just the past and future of their story together. The story of Naeem and Maya is a violent disintegration of not only *what was* but also of *what might have been*.

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<sup>88</sup>Maryama finally reveals to Ali who his father is: the man who visits, Hicham Alvarez. The novel never states it explicitly but it is very clear that Aysha and Hicham do get married and have a son, Ali. Hasan and Maryama are Ali's paternal grandparents, and Saad and Saleem are his maternal grandparents. In the first book, the reader sees Hasan propose for his son to marry Saleema's daughter.

Names and narratives provide something numbers in historical accounts cannot. Naming his unborn children gives Naeem a better ability to mourn. By naming his children, he is first and foremost affirming the reality of what he lost. When the victims of genocide remain unnamed, it is necessary to affirm their existence by naming them. Outside of the text, the narrative function of naming Naeem's children within this work of historiographic metafiction makes the readers remember the reality of how many names can never be remembered, even with the historical documentation which exists. Naming his unborn children gives Naeem a better ability to mourn. By naming his children, affirming the reality of what he lost. When the victims of genocide remain unnamed, it is necessary to affirm their existence by naming them.

The way that human loss is represented greatly shapes the power for us to appreciate its true significance. Naeem's memories of Maya and imagining Hilal, Badr, and Qamar in fiction echo the violence of real genocide. As Emil B. Towner writes in her article about the ways of representing and remembering the 1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda, "a focus on individual loss provides a depth of understanding and compassion that simply cannot be communicated by numbers."<sup>89</sup> In her article, she cites the examples from both history, such as the story of Anne Frank, and historical fiction, like the movie *Hotel Rwanda*, and reminds readers that, in "quantification rhetoric," numbers are used to demonstrate evidence of the size or scale of human suffering, to document death tolls, establish the occurrence of genocide and to assess the need for intervention and assistance (Towner 629).

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<sup>89</sup>Towner, Emil B. "Quantifying Genocide: What Are We Really Counting (On)?" *JAC*, vol. 31, no. 3/4, 2011, pp. 625–638. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/41709663](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41709663). Web.

Unfortunately, we become desensitized to large rounded numbers. These numbers become problematic because many are only estimations, and “the larger the guesses, the more meaningless they appear to become” since “the human mind, even if it could respond to distant mass murder, simply has trouble comprehending such large rounded numbers” (Towner 631-632,634-635). As opposed to the large scale focus of numerical facts, fiction allows us to grow intimately involved in the micro-scale, to zoom in on one person’s imagination and emotions and Towner mentions “the artistic approach of those narratives moves beyond statistical accounts of the multitudes and into human perspectives of the individual” as they “recast—and concretize—the genocide in such a way that suffering and loss are not only evident but can be experienced and understood” (629-630).

Maryama’s vision of nature prefaces the return of Naeem. The vision and interpretations of Maryama are firstly an example of hope in the face of uncertainty as Maryama, unlike the readers, does not know what is going to happen. Secondly, the vision foreshadows Naeem’s return. Lastly, the moon and the stag is the first example of how all of Maryama’s hopes and fears manifest in images of and engagement with nature. Om Yúsef tells Maryama she has had a vision of a comet, which only comes as a sign of immense changes, and that the upcoming change is that the end is near for the reign of the tyrants who rule over them. The woman says it will occur within seven years, and she uses more images of nature to reinforce the hope planted in Maryama’s imagination (Comendador 296). She offers images of trees bearing fruit and bees, harboring honey-abundance, fertility, and growth (Comendador 294).

The focus does not lie in whether the woman is correct or incorrect in her dream interpretations, but rather we see how Maryama's hopes and fears are imagined and projected in nature. As nature changes in a cyclical fashion and the moon returns to the sky after the sun disappears, Maryama's greatest hope is for the return of those who have left her. Immediately after visiting the woman, she dreams of her daughters and sons, and all their children, being able to visit Maryama in Granada. Maryama's children never return to her. The vision of the stag and the moon represents the return of Naeem.

This image represents the first in a series of echoes within the rest of the trilogy. After the vision of Maryama, the reader sees the flashback where Maya and Naeem hunted, and the moon witnesses the horror of that event. After the flashback, a painting of a hunting party repeats the motif of imagery connecting the family to nature and feelings of persecution. The readers see through Maryama's eyes a painting in a Castilian noble's house, and the painting itself is a visual, metaphorical prison of possibilities for the descendants of Abu Jaafar from the perspective of Maryama, who feels trapped by the circumstances of her life at that moment. The painting serves as a mirror to Maryama as well. She sees herself in the eyes of the hunted and wounded animal surrounded by hostile hunters and hounds. The mirroring and identification stem from a deeply hidden internal processing of the visual display. The identification process in itself creates an odd juxtaposition because it is the internal, hidden Muslim identity of Maryama, which sees its counterpart and parallel in the eyes of the trapped animal.

Within the colonial gaze, Nature is also Other. The colonial vision views nature and all that inhabit it as another collective entity to be possessed, a source of materials to

be exploited, and the colonial narrative paints nature as an absence to be occupied and settled. With Ashour's intertextuality of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and her representation of flora and fauna within the novel, she paints nature and animals as allies-as companions of the descendants of Abu Jaafar. They are perceived with empathy, and the characters often identify strongly with the representations of nature, as well as the physical nature which surrounds them.

Ashour's characterization of nature helps move beyond exoticized and romanticized representations of Islamic architecture and garden landscaping, reduced into empty traces which contain much more meaning than colonial visions of conquered spaces will allow. Nature is in the background or a source of extractions, a silent object of awe and admiration within the colonial gaze of *The Fountain*, but in the Quran as the foundation of the Islamic conception of nature, even ants can speak, and nature has a voice, an existence from which human beings should learn.<sup>90</sup> Ashour combines oppositional elements within her representations—scenes of enclosure and display, the hunt, and the spectacle it involves. Saleema is literally “boxed in,” she is caged when the Inquisition seizes and sentences her to death for witchcraft, making her punishment into a public spectacle. The painting of the hunting scene is the art on display in the house Maryama enters, yet it evokes an oppressive sensation of doom upon Maryama. The representation through language in itself becomes a figurative prison of possibilities for the colonized subject. Said notes how “the Oriental is contained and represented by dominating frameworks” (40). The image of containment again evokes a connection and

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<sup>90</sup> Khan, Maulana Wahiduddin. *The Quran*. Edited by Farida Khanam, Goodword Books, 2009. Print.

a profound identification between the depiction of Abu Jaafar's descendants and the image of beasts of prey—a link and solidarity between the human and nonhuman experience of colonialism.

The figurative prison of possibilities in rhetoric like animalistic metaphors used to dehumanize the *morisco* Other becomes subverted as the reader adopts Maryama's gaze during her sustained observation of the painting.<sup>91</sup> The chapter does not begin with a description of Maryama approaching the painting. The reader, like Maryama, is thrown directly into the middle of the scene of the painting. The narration starts from inside the painting (without being told it is a painting), and the chapter begins *in media res*.

The stag had not fallen yet, but his front legs folded beneath him. He had a purple gash in his chest, and a small trickle of blood was flowing from his wound. He was surrounded by the sharp tips of the lances the hunters were blandishing forward, their eyes shining with a savage pride for the successful catch. They donned hats with ostrich feathers; they were dressed in embroidered velvet garments and silk breeches tightly fitted to their muscular, robust legs. The scene was filled with colors: the hats, their feathers, the garments, the bugles the huntsman was playing, the panting greyhounds, with their tongues out after the lengthy pursuit; the trees: orange trees, cherry trees and pomegranate trees; and the flowers: violets, madonna lilies, daffodils, and roses.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Fuchs, Barbara. *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities*, Cambridge University Press, 2001. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucr/detail.action?docID=202021>. Web.

<sup>92</sup>No se había caído aún, pero se le doblaban las patas delanteras. De un orificio color púrpura que tenía en el pecho le manaba un hilillo de sangre. Estaba rodeado por las puntas de las lanzas que esgrimían los cazadores, en cuyos ojos brillaba salvaje el orgullo por la pieza lograda. Iban tocados de sombreros con plumas de avestruz y vestidos con trajes de terciopelo bordado y calzas de seda ajustadas a las piernas musculosas, recias. Todo era de colores: los sombreros, sus plumas, los ropajes, las cornetas que tocaban los monteros, los galgos jadeantes, con la lengua fuera tras la larga persecución; los árboles: naranjos, cerezos y granados; y las flores: violetas, azucenas, narcisos y rosas. (Comendador 336)

Ashour's writing manipulates the vision of the reader and creates a focused frame like a camera lens, which slowly pans out into the wider scene. This first paragraph moves from the initial proximity with the buckling, bleeding body to its surroundings: the hunters, the look in the hunters' eyes and their colorful clothes, and their panting greyhounds. The vision expands to show the natural surroundings of both the hunted and the hunter. Within the narration, the horror of Maryama's gaze upon the scene becomes juxtaposed with the beauty of the foliage. The natural surroundings are not a blank space of background vegetation. Every flower and every tree have a name.

The text aligns the vision of the Maryama with the hunted stag. Her vision centers first on its bleeding body to focus on the violence of the end of the pursuit. The strangeness and almost grotesque inversion here is the fact that a human being finds a greater sense of alliance in the animal world as opposed to other human beings. It's as if time has slowed down, and just before a fatal end, every detail becomes clearer, and every color more vivid due to the heightened emotions and intensity of the scene. The hunted creature has not fallen yet, but the reader does not need to see what follows to know what will happen at the fatal conclusion. It is not until the second paragraph of the chapter that the reader's vision is moved to acknowledge the painting as a representation rather than a reality, and made aware of Maryama's contemplation of it. The text highlights the perception of Maryama seeing deep contrast between the eyes of the hunters with their panting greyhounds and the eyes of the stag.

Maryama contemplated the hunting scene that unfolded before her eyes: the scene occupied an entire wall. She paused her gaze upon the stag, which lowered his forehead as if the tangled branches of his horns weighed heavily upon him. It seemed as though he were staring sadly into an empty abyss. In addition to the

pain, the gentleness in his gaze gave his countenance humanlike characteristics. She kept her gaze upon the animal after having spread her attention over the details of the painting and its golden frame.<sup>93</sup>

She focuses on the lowered gaze of the deer, which appears to be looking into nothingness with a blank, sad stare. This stare recalls the same blank stare Abu Jaafar saw in the eyes of the naked woman walking barefoot down the road at the very beginning of the novel and if we make this connection, this gives the eyes the added weight of the trauma of a lost home and safety, peace-all stolen away. The woman's silent body represented aftershock and everlasting trauma. War is not a glorious process, especially for those who lose. And it is not strange for us to link the eyes of a deer to the eyes of a human being here because the text itself makes that connection; Maryamah herself sees a strange likeness. For Maryama, the text specifically states that the deer's eyes take on such pain and gentleness that its facial characteristics seem almost human. Maryama remains paused before the animal before her attention, along with the readers', finally moves to the fact that this depiction is a painting with a golden frame around it. The golden frame, which ends the second paragraph, becomes the final limit of the camera lens, which has zoomed out from within the painting.

The narrative places the reader in the middle of the action. Ashour's visual construction of the scene is a perfect example of what Caroline Seymour-Jorn describes when she cites Etidal Osman, and emphasizes how Ashour "employs sensual detail with a

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<sup>93</sup>Moraima contempló la cacería que se desplegaba ante sus ojos: la escena ocupaba una pared. Detuvo la vista en el venado que inclinaba la testuz como si le pesara la corona de cornamenta enmarañada. Parecía mirar triste al vacío. Más allá de la pena, la dulzura confería a su rostro rasgos humanos. Se detuvo en el animal después de haber dispersado su atención por los detalles de la pintura y su marco dorado. (Comendador 338)



photographic sharpness that allows her to characterize the physical, cultural, and psychological environments of her characters.”<sup>94</sup> The narration places the reader in the action of the painting and then zooms outwards, like a photographic lens, to show Maryama standing still before it. The contextual detail of why Maryama is standing next to this painting only appears afterward. A paragraph describing Maryama’s initial entrance into the house containing the painting forms an explanation which could have just as easily have appeared at the very beginning of the chapter, but it follows much later on. Ashour’s sequence in her narration in sinking the readers deep into the painting before anything else, highlights the critical significance of the scene, especially as it echoes the other scenes of Abu Jaafar’s descendants who are hunted like the stag in the painting. Maryama’s description echoes the same effect Ashour creates for the reader.

When she entered the house, she was taken aback by its size and the luxurious furnishings, but only for an instant, because she immediately saw the painting. She was about to leap back; she had the sensation of being unwillingly plunged into the middle of a hunting party full of hunters and hounds. In her life, she had never seen a painting of that size. People said in the cathedral there were enormous images of the Virgin Mary, of Jesus Christ and other saints, but she had never entered the cathedral, and hearsay is not the same as seeing something with one’s own eyes.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Seymour-Jorn, Caroline. *Cultural Criticism in Egyptian Women’s Writing*. 1st ed. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011. Print. P. 112.

<sup>95</sup> Cuando entró en la casa, la sorprendieron la amplitud y el lujo de sus muebles, pero solo un instante, porque enseguida vio el cuadro. A punto estuvo de echarse atrás de un salto, tuvo la sensación de haberse metido sin querer en mitad de una montería atestada de cazadores y podencos. En su vida había visto un cuadro de semejante tamaño. Decían que en la catedral había imágenes enormes de la Virgen María, de Jesucristo y de otros santos, pero ella nunca había entrado en la catedral, y oír hablar no es lo mismo que ver una con sus ojos. (Comendador 338)

The painting occupies her entire field of vision due to its size. Just as Maryama feels the sensation of having been suddenly inserted right in the middle of a hunt at the end of a pursuit, this is the parallel sensation readers are made to experience through the focal point initiating the chapter. The narrative creates an emphasis on vision because hearing of such a painting is not the same thing as seeing it with one's own eyes. Hearing or reading about the history of the Moors and the Moriscos is not the same sensation as seeing it with one's own eyes. Ashour's fiction creates a visual experience and produces an immersive experience of that history—a vision that does not relegate the Muslim perspectives to the background, or conflate them, or reduce them all together with mere traces and stereotypes.

The painting has left a lasting impression on Maryama because of its connection to her dreams. The painting also evokes memories of Saleema and Saad for the reader. Saleema was put in a basket when she was taken away by the Inquisition. They carried her away in a basket for fear of touching her as she was accused of witchcraft. Saleema was surrounded and cornered like the stag within the painting.

This painting of the hunted builds on a collective memory horror rather than suspense because Maryama remembers what happens to people like Saleema. The painting has a ripple effect for the reader, but it has an immersive effect on Maryama, as it completely overtakes her vision as if she were there in the painting surrounded by hunters as well. Maryama tells Hasan and Naeem: “On the wall, I saw a painting of an

injured stag, with hunters and hounds” (Comendador 338).<sup>96</sup> The subject of the painting is the stag, not the hunters and their hounds within the perception of Maryama. These are the words, but the words only scratch the surface as the image of the wounded deer surrounded by hunters and hounds has penetrated the thoughts of Maryama. Ashour sets the tone for the internal world of Maryama and the way her imagination shapes her perception of reality in the second book of the trilogy, and within the narrative, it is called “*los ojos de la imaginación*,” eyes of the imagination (Comendador 298). She continues to think on it to herself and in her thoughts, and the internal dialogue conveys the intense identification the character feels with the painting:

And if she went to tell Om Yúsef what she had seen? A painting was just a painting, not a comet whose appearance could foretell anything, nor was it a vision that could be interpreted by a seer. Om Yúsef would laugh at her and say: “The stag you saw was nothing but a figure in a hunting scene. How could you confuse that with the vision God granted you in a dream?” Might it be an artifact of the devil to confuse her so that she could not distinguish between the truth and a lie? Between the real and the imaginary?... That image was not a coincidence; maybe it was a sign that God had allowed them to prolong their tyranny until they believed their power was established, so that later the tables would turn and the defeated would become the victor, which was what God had written within His plans, and that that was what she saw in her dreams with her own eyes.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>En la pared he visto un cuadro de un ciervo herido, con cazadores y perros. (Comendador 338)

<sup>97</sup>¿Y si iba a contarle lo que había visto a OmYúsef? Un cuadro era un cuadro, no un cometa de cuya aparición se pronostica algo, ni una visión que puedan explicar los adivinos. OmYúsef se reiría de ella y le diría: <<El ciervo que viste no era más que una figura de una escena de caza. ¿Cómo mezclas eso con la visión que Dios te concedió en un sueño?>> ¿Sería cosa del demonio que quería confundirla haciendo que no distinguiera entre lo que es verdad y mentira, entre lo real y la imaginación? ...Aquella imagen no era una casualidad, tal vez fuera una señal de que Dios les había permitido prolongar su tiranía hasta que ellos creyeran que estaban bien asentados, para luego hacer que cambiaran las tornas de modo que el vencido saliera vencedor, que era lo que Dios tenía escrito con sus designios, y que eso fue lo que en sueños vio con sus propios ojos. (Comendador 338-339)

Absence overtakes this description of space. The narration zooms in on the details of every trace of life left behind. These traces are a trigger on the reader, who has followed the story of Abu Jaafar's family. These erasures which mark the emptiness of the space Ali finds starkly contrast with the way reader has seen the family of Abu Jaafar interacting with space in daily experience. Ashour has shown how spaces like the home in the Albaicín or the cityscape of Granada possess emotional anchors in the interior spaces of the characters. The true challenges and losses experienced for the family over timeshows in their relationship with both natural and constructed environments.

### **Subjective Histories and Storytelling**

The violence against Saleema and the trauma of Naeem is representative of repeated, systemic violence, not as unique or solitary events. Within the novel, how the descendants of Abu Jaafar and their loved ones are hunted, trapped, and then taken away echoes throughout the trilogy. The violence committed against Saleema is felt by her whole family, and her death echoes in the subjectivity of characters like Maryama later in the novel. We learn of the almost immediate affect her death has upon her husband, Saad. He dies soon after witnessing the public murder of his wife. The narrative problematizes the power of the institution which condemns her. The spectacle of her death before the masses is not admitted entry into the narrative because Saleema's death is an act of heinous, unjust violence. Ashour foreshadows Saleema's death, and through Maryama, the narrative is filled with the echoes of Saleema's death after the fact. The first part of

the trilogy is named for Granada. The end of Saleema is truly the end of Granada.

Granada ceases to be the same space for the family of Abu Jaafar once Saleema is killed.

The first shift in time in the entire trilogy beginning in *Granada* occurs through a flashback of Naeem. The second book takes the reader back to the beginning of the first book. Alone and orphaned, he was found and adopted by Abu Jaafar and Umm Jaafar and taken in as a son and apprentice to learn the craft of calligraphy and binding of Arabic texts. Naeem remembers and recounts his story to Saad, whom Abu Jaafar takes in after Saad loses his home and family in Malaga. Naeem and Saad grow up with Abu Jaafar's children as they train in the art of bookbinding, but when all Arabic texts are banned, all *hammams* are closed, and all practices linked to an Arab heritage or a Muslim identity are outlawed, all of Abu Jaafar's descendants take different paths.

Naeem had left, with his clothes, his pipe, and his scent of tobacco. And with his long and solitary story whose links were bound together with one after another. What Naeem recounted to him were stories unlike those of Maryama. He had recounted his story starting from the moment a tall man with blue eyes extended his hand and asked, "What's your name, son?", took him to his house and asked his wife to bathe him and feed him. Later the man taught him to dye the leather and to bind the books. Each chapter of his story painted people, places, and events that he had seen with his own eyes, whose details he had lived. He spoke of Saad, the one who came from Malaga, and of Saleema, who used to read books and cure the maladies of the people. He spoke of the Granada of the Muslims, and of a small village on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean with vegetation so thick that, in comparison, Granada seemed like a barren plain. It used to rain a lot, so much that the rainfall in one day measured the rainfall of Al-Andalus for one year. In that village, according to Naeem, he had a wife and three children, each born on nights under the moonlight, the first of which was a boy named Hilal; the second, a boy named Badr; and the third, a girl named Qamar. "And why did you leave your children, Uncle Naeem? "Tomorrow, I will tell you," he used to say. But the next day, he would continue with another chapter of the story.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Naím se había ido, con su ropa, su pipa y su olor a Tabaco. Y con su larga y única historia cuyos eslabones se encadenaban una vez tras otra. Lo que Naím le contó no se

Naeem's memory of Abu Jaafar's first taking him in is the recollection that begins the first chapter of the first book of Ashour's trilogy. Naeem is the first character who takes us back into the past as we see Abu Jaafar through his eyes. Naeem's interior memories begin the first chapter of Ashour's text. In the language of Ali's reflection upon Naeem's death, one sentence is followed by another, and the narration itself unites the idea of bookbinding and creating a manuscript to the memories and stories accumulated through the experiences lived over the expanse of a lifetime: "each chapter of his story painted people, places, and events that he had seen with his own eyes, whose details he had lived".<sup>99</sup>

Ashour elevates the experiences of Naeem's life to the same craftsmanship and care he was taught to create a manuscript. The people who occupy Naeem's story are "painted" because, through the language of storytelling, Ali was able *to see* the faces and places just as Naeem had seen them. The language in these sentences focuses on the intimate details Naeem was able to communicate through these stories. The way the

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parecía a los cuentos de Maryama. Le había contado su historia desde el momento en que un hombre de ojos azules, alto, le tendió la mano y le preguntó: << ¿Cómo te llamas, niño? >>, lo llevó con él a su casa y le pidió a su esposa que lo bañara y le diera de comer. Luego le enseñó a teñir las pieles y a encuadernar los libros. Cada capítulo de su historia dibujaba personas, lugares y hechos que habían visto sus ojos, cuyos detalles había vivido. Le habló de Saad, el que vino de Málaga, y de Salima, que leía libros y curaba los males de la gente. Le habló de la Granada de los moros y de una aldea en la costa del océano Atlántico de vegetación tan espesa que, comparada con ella, Granada parecía un páramo. Llovía mucho, tanto que en un día caía lo que caía en Al-Ándalus a lo largo de un año. En aquel pueblo, según Naím, tenía una esposa y tres hijos nacidos en noches de luna, al primero de los cuales llamó Hilal; al segundo, Badr; y a la tercera, Cámar. << ¿Y por qué dejó allí a sus hijos, tío Naím? >>. <<Mañana te lo contaré>>, decía. Pero al día siguiente continuaba con otro capítulo de la historia. (Comendador 357)

<sup>99</sup>Cada capítulo de su historia dibujaba personas, lugares y hechos que habían visto sus ojos, cuyos detalles había vivido. (Comendador 357)

sentence ends hits the tone of the whole trilogy. Rather than focusing on how Muslims were expelled or defeated, Ashour's trilogy focuses on how they lived despite the multiple obstacles that faced communities like the one in Granada. The text of Ashour is more than a counter-narrative to the story of erasure and destruction, exile, and defeat. Granada is defeated. Ashour shows how characters like Maryama and Naeem continued to fill the chapters of their stories in their experience of defeat, death, and destruction.

Chapters make up Naeem's life narrative because stories serve to house the collective experiences, emotions, imaginations, and inspirations of individuals and communities. Stories are a manifest form of the transmission of cultural heritage. Saleema's books and the collective stories Hasan, Naeem, and Maryama, tell Ali—all conjoin to form the main root and stem of Ali's inspirations and imagination. Each life is like a book, a collection of stories, whether oral or written. While Saleema and Abu Jaafar are more aligned with textual knowledge, Naeem, Maryama, and Saad represent oral storytelling.

In Ali's reflection over Naeem's death, the language marks a critical link between life, memory, and storytelling. Their lives are like stories, and the traces of their memory, their voice are transferred to Ali. In Ali's reflection, the stages of Naeem's life are chapters of a story. This image recalls the same language Saleema used to describe her life as pages in a book. Ali's focus on Naeem's long and unique story parallels the pages in Saleema's book. In her book, *The Afterlife of Al-Andalus: Muslim Iberia in Contemporary Arab and Hispanic Narratives*, Christina Civantos dedicates a chapter to the analysis of the Scheherazade trope in Radwa Ashour's *Granada Trilogy*, which is "at

its core, a reminder of the narrative process,” and the self-referential techniques Ashour uses first “raises questions about the relationship between reality and fiction,” and secondly, “emphasizes the constructed nature of Al-Andalus as a narrative that can be reformulated to improve the present and the future” (281). The most important parallel to the storytelling of Scheherazade and the storytelling seen in Ashour’s trilogy is the purpose of survival. Maryama is the character that most strongly reflects the skill of Scheherazade, and her stories save the community members who are hiding their Muslim identities from the Inquisition. While storytelling is the source of immaterial survival and cultural preservation, the material source of survival is found in a vital object—the *sundug*, or wedding chest, which reappears on multiple occasions in the trilogy.

### **Material Memories in a Box: The Three *Sundugs* and Their Symbolism**

The experience of Muslims like Abu Jaafar, Naeem, and Saad in Spain was an experience intimately connected to their art. In the novel, Ali’s learned craft forms a cornerstone of his own identity, an extension of his own corporeal imprinted upon the tactile and visual grooves and ornamentations of the object his own hands have formed. Ali’s love for his craft reflects the same kind of affection his grandfather had for the manuscripts he would bind and embellish. The internal contemplation of a craftsman still beholden by and connected to the object even after his hands have left it to stand alone. The image of Ali beholding this box leaves larger implications for the spaces, which can still be seen in Spain today as the craftsmen left their trace upon the pillars and tiles even



after the hands and tools are gone and forgotten. These objects are more than mere ornaments. They are sources of identity, collective memory, and cultural inheritance.

The act of creation becomes a gesture of liberation as Ali lets a piece of himself escape with the box. However, it is also an act of preservation as the box will remain somewhere with someone even when Ali is absent and forgotten. Ali is a Muslim artisan working and surviving under Christian rule, a reign that Ashour shows as an institutionalized force whittling away at the core and edges of every and all traces associated with Muslim identity in Spain. In a novel displaying the historical processes which gnawed away at the common threads of entire communities, it becomes significant when the narration creates an abundance of textual discourse surrounding a single object which is not acted upon by any human being within the passage.

The readers understand the physical and transcendental significance of the object through a single gaze, that of Ali, who focalizes the reader's experience. It is also significant that Ashour narrates the vision of Ali to zoom in on a box over any other type of object he possibly could have been assigned to make. Like the box, Hasan can only show certain aspects of himself while he must maintain others internally, out of sight and hidden like the contents of the box itself. It is not his box because he has to make it for its future owner.

Ashour focuses the lens through Ali's eyes in his craftsmanship of the box. Earlier on, we see descriptions that accentuate the craftsmanship, the love of something crafted with his own hands, in the episodes when Saad and Naeem learn to ornament manuscripts with calligraphy and illustrations. In *The Arts of Intimacy*, the authors discuss the

difficulty and genealogy of the term *Mudéjar* which was first used to refer to a style of architecture but was then applied to the people themselves, a Muslim living under Christian rule but they go on to discuss the difficulty of scholars trying to neatly separate styles, periods and identities into independent categories and influences—difficulties which come about because the categories and experiences of the patrons and artisans were neat nor did they exist in isolated terms (Dodds Menocal Balbale 323 -327). The authors grant that these were buildings that represented a “liminal position...a group apart from the master narratives of both European medieval architecture and Spanish medieval architecture” (324). They describe one of their chief bibliographic sources: Gonzalo Borrás Gualis who “sees Mudejar as a continuation of Islamic traditions—an Islamic aesthetic in Christian art—and emphasizes that a large number of those who constructed these churches and palaces had Arabic names, and called themselves Muslims” (325).

The material memories Ashour revives within her fiction are not only limited to material objects but also constructed spaces. Ashour is a kind of rival storyteller who can reassign meaning to the public and private spaces of her characters by narrating their internal dialogue and engagement with the constructed environment around them. One of the most important symbols of Al-Andalus and the Orientalist mythology which surrounds it is the Alhambra, but Ashour shows how meanings shift even while places physically *stay in place*. Ali’s perception of the Alhambra is one key example of the mutability of the spaces according to their perception and placement within memory and lived experience. Within Ali’s vision, the Alhambra is foreign in the past, and present-it

had always been the seat of power both of the Nasrid dynasty and the Castilian crown, but it never enters the central narrative of Ashour's fiction.

Every morning he used to go to work...He would go down the hill when he left, and when he returned he would go up the hill, and both times he used to see the fortress of the Alhambra--which was the residence of the authorities, the soldier barracks and the warehouse for weapons and gunpowder--and he would also see the mountains which stretched and rose high behind the fortress, in a haze of clouds and snow upon their peaks, illuminated with each hour and season in the colors of the morning and afternoon.<sup>100</sup>

The Alhambra, in this passage, is part of the background within this story. Ashour creates an alternative perspective of the Orientalist gaze within her fiction from the perspective of her characters. The political environment is becoming more strained and tense for the community of Granadan Moriscos, and Ali is keeping more than a few secrets from Maryama regarding current events. According to the news circulating among those of the Albaicín, more than one hundred important, influential people of Granada have been detained. Various houses have been searched for weapons, and some of the Muslims had assaulted soldiers and public officials.<sup>101</sup>

This momentary glance of Ali shows how Ashour focuses on the ordinary and mundane experiences and objects in order to convey the deeper experience of loss of the

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<sup>100</sup> Cadamañanaiba a trabajar...Bajaba la colina al ir, y de regreso la subía, y las dos veces miraba la Alhambra—que era la residencia de las autoridades, el cuartel de los soldados y el depósito de las armas y pólvora—y miraba también la sierra que se extendía detrás elevándose sobre ella, nebulosa, cubiertas de nieve sus cumbres, iluminándose al paso de las horas y estaciones con los colores de la mañana y la tarde. (Comendador 369)

<sup>101</sup> Comendador uses the term *moros* here, as she uses the same word to describe Hernando Benamar; I believe Muslim is the best translation because these are not Moors of North Africa but their descendants and the defining characteristic in this moment of the novel appears to be the noncompliance of the cultural proclamations against them, but I think *Morisco* is a better term.

family. Ali travels back and forth to the workshop where he creates beautiful material wealth with other artisans. In addition to redirecting the gaze of the reader away from the spaces of the elite, Ashour points to the significance of ordinary household objects and the way they engage the experience, memory, and loss of the characters she presents. Just like the chest which Maryama brings to the house of Hasan when she marries him, collective and individual memory is like the *sunduq* to house our memories of loss and the memories of our family members.

In the context of Ashour's novel, the *sunduq* is the "dowry chest" of Maryama, and this cultural object is found in many regions and cultures as it is a rectangular, decorated box which would accompany a bride when she would enter the home of her husband's family, and it would be used for storing the special clothes, jewelry and other valuables or gifts the family would pass on to the daughter for her marriage; it sometimes had smaller compartments within it, and larger chests could also have a double, practical use as a table or bench as well (Stone 25). These ornate chests are still manufactured today, but in her article, *The Art of the Dowry Chest*, Caroline Stone cites a famous historical example of a casket from Al-Andalus: an ivory *sunduq* from Madinat Al-Zahra which was made for the daughter of Abd Al-Rahman III and contained an Arabic inscription upon it (25).

The chest the reader first sees when we meet the character of Maryama is an object Ashour uses symbolically within the trilogy to combat the erasures of occupation and conquest. Upon following the imagery in the last two books, the way the chest is used and the appearance of more imagery surrounding this specific object can help us

elaborate on the significance of the *sundug* that Civantos writes about in her chapter.

According to Civantos, the significance of Maryama as a character is shown in the fact that hers is the only person's name chosen as the title for one of the books from the trilogy, and this importance automatically extends to her *sundug* (272).

There are three boxes in the story of Ali. The first one belongs to Maryama, and as Civantos mentions, it is linked to memories of her childhood when she used to hide in the chest (277). In the end, the body of Maryama is also paralleled with the texts buried in the chest and hidden under the earth of the home Ali is being forced to leave. This link between Maryama's body and the bodies of text hidden in the chest is where the equivalence of corporality and knowledge come full circle. Saleema embodies the preservation and transmission of written knowledge. Maryama's body shows how she symbolizes another part of the cultural inheritance of Al-Andalus—oral knowledge and cultural imagination. The body of Maryama and the family's cultural heritage (the books hidden in the chest) are both embedded in the space (the urban space in the garden of the house of the Albaicín and the rural space when Maryama dies in the countryside).

The second *sundug* we see in the trilogy is the one Ali creates after he goes to become an apprentice in the workshop of Hernando Benamar, along with Jose Benamar and Federico. Ali makes the second *sundug* inside the workshop, and it is then put on display in order to be sold. Firstly, the detailed description of Ali's gaze upon the finished product which he has crafted with such intense care and artistry mirrors the same care and skill his great grandfather, Abu Jaafar, was described with when he was binding and embellishing manuscripts. Secondly, the creation of the box evokes the

interconnected material history of Morisco artisans and the popularity of the Mudejar aesthetic styles (architecture, clothing, crafts), which Balbale, Dodds, and Menocal describe in their work, *The Arts of Intimacy*. The objects they describe in their work on the cultural production of the hybrid cultural interactions of the Iberian Peninsula are used as examples for how communities were as intimately interwoven, layered upon, and mixed as the artistic styles used to design the spaces and objects they inhabited and valued.

The second *sunduq* is also a very important example of how Ashour inverts the perspective to take account of the erasures stamped upon the cultural history of Al-Andalus. The second *sunduq* is an object to be sold, and Ali or his family members will not use it. As it is inlaid with intricate designs of gold, it will most likely be purchased by a noble, Castilian family, but the focus is not on the consumer of morisco culture, rather it is on the creator of that material object of culture. Ashour inverts the perspective because when these types of objects are bought, sold, or put on display in a museum, it is typically accompanied by the anonymity of the artist. The artisans are usually unknown, unnamed. In the narrative of the second *sunduq*, this conventional dynamic is reversed. We do not know the end destination of the *sunduq* in question, but Ashour's narrative has allowed us to contemplate the dreams, desires, and intimate details of the life of the artist whose hands shaped that object into existence. The readers see Ali carving the figures into the wood, and we see the personal pride and love he pours into his work. The language describes the deep pleasure in Ali's gaze as he looks upon the box and by focusing on the creative act, this episode parallels the focus on the non-negative, the non-

absence, the non-emptiness of culture, knowledge, art, memory, history, and agency of the community of Moriscos (and Muslims). This creative act is another gesture used to build the counter-narrative to the erasures and destruction of the signs of Ali's cultural identity as an Arab (and a Muslim).

Ali and the reader have no idea as to where the *sunduq* will go or what it will be used for, or who will buy it. The destiny of the box is uncertain, and the future owner might never contemplate the hands that crafted the flowers and animal figures upon its surface, but Ashour purposefully draws our attention to the aspects of this box which will most likely be forgotten-the fact that it represents the material memories of the man who made it with attention and care. After finishing the box, Ali only wishes he could take it to show to Maryama in order to show her what he did, but of course, it is for the shop, and he cannot take it anywhere. However, what if he had been allowed to keep it?

In the first book, readers see what the destiny of such a box *might have* been. Upon the marriage of Maryama and Hasan, the readers see the original cultural history of how a *sunduq* contained the memories and treasures of a family, and how it possibly might have been passed down for generations among children and through marriages. One humorous event is when Maryama and Saleema use the *sunduq* to hide the forbidden Arabic texts right under Hasan's nose. The family who will buy the *sunduq*, which Ali makes in Benamar's workshop, will give the item a future unknown to the reader, but through the constant presence of Maryama's *sunduq*, the reader can see how such an item would preserve intimate memories of the past. This gesture by Ashour against erasure because the personal histories like the ones linked to Maryama's chest are unseen,

unknown, and thus unaccounted for in the history of conquered, occupied, and assimilated communities like that of the Albaicín.

The box represents a type of history lost and unaccounted. We do not know where Ali's *sunduq* will go, but we know where Maryama's *sunduq* has been. When the reader first sees the *sunduq* in the narrative, Maryama's chest is described in precise detail along with every single object contained within it. Not only is this object linked to intimate memories of someone's past, but it is also connected to hopes for the future. In the first description, it is filled with blessings and hopes for Maryama's future because she takes it with her when she begins a new stage in her life when she marries Hasan and goes to live with the rest of the family in the house of the Albaicín.

The third *sunduq* is the one Ali makes for Cáuzar. It is linked to a violent sense of loss because, within the story, it connects to the deaths of two young women. Most articles that discuss Ashour's trilogy leave out the story of Cáuzar and her sister Salsabil. That might be linked to access and translation as the first book is the only one translated into English, as mentioned before, and the story of other female characters like Fedda and Cáuzar are in the second two books. The *sunduq* is linked to a tragic episode of gender violence, and this storyline in the novel depicts the murder of two sisters. Ali is never able to give the *sunduq* to the person it is meant for, and his love for a girl who is much younger than him makes him follow her story after he first sees her in the village where he decides to stay on as the Arabic teacher. His unreciprocated love for Cáuzar serves as a narrative vehicle because through Ali, and we can follow the story of Cáuzar. He makes the *sunduq* for her and inscribes her name in it.



The last *sunduq* is connected to the story of Cáuzar and her twin sister Salsabil. Firstly, their names are significant because both twins are named after bodies of water in heaven, according to the Quran. Salsabil is the name of a fountain in Heaven, and Cáuzar is the name of a river in heaven, which is described as being whiter than milk and sweeter than honey. It is also the name of the chapter of the Quran, which describes that river in heaven. The names of these two women evoke spaces described within the Quran, within the Islamic environmental imagination. Their names' meanings link to the Islamic image of paradise, but in a dark inversion, their destinies and deaths are a hellish episode in the community. There is a story of a community that has drowned in an environment of secrecy, suspicion, and paranoia. This gender violence reads as signs of the destruction of the community as a whole.

While second *sunduq* evokes the cultural heritage erased by external forces of conquest and occupation, the third *sunduq* evokes the life cut short by internal violence—a violence depicted as unnatural, tragic, and traumatic. The Islamic faith does not condone “honor” killings. After seeing Benamar's betrayal of his childhood companion Ali, Ashour deepens the intimacy of violence seen in the third book as Cáuzar's own family is clearly implicated in the murder of her sister. Ali, a fellow Muslim, is a witness to this violence in the same manner as the reader. In the novel, this event is a shock and heinous crime that contrasts the idea of unity amidst adversity. Ashour's representation of the killing of Cáuzar and Salsabil does not perpetuate the stereotype of the oppression of Muslim women. Rather it represents an allusion to the reality of the violence against women's bodies, which is not unique to any culture, faith, or race. Within the trilogy, this

is the first instance the reader sees a family kill their daughters, and for the reader, it is represented as a crime which is kept secret for fear of the Inquisition officials discovering other crimes, though the death itself is not explicitly described. (Because crimes like praying are criminalized, the community becomes blind to true crimes caused by tribalism and misogyny).

The story of Cáuzar and Salsabil is another example of Ashour's fiction evoking a violent reality. The story of Cáuzar demonstrates a gradual arch in the environment of secrecy and surveillance of the community as Moriscos. Over time the secrets kept by the crypto-Muslims become mixed with more harmful secrets. In the first book, the community keeps secrets as a united group, and Abu Jaafar's family continues to practice the Islamic faith together secretly. However, gradually, even within a single family, the members start to keep secrets from each other. Neighbors and children are viewed with suspicion. The environment of surveillance and punishment has drowned in suspicion.

The deepest form of defeat Ashour shows her readers in the trilogy is the degradation of the position of the women in the trilogy. The reader will remember Saleema and see the state of Nayat. The Muslims represented in Ashour's narrative are not meant to be perfect. Saleema neglects her husband cruelly and coldly. Saad hits his wife after months of neglect. Hasan sleeps with another woman. Ali sleeps with a prostitute, Nayat, in Valencia. Her characterizations serve a dual purpose. Firstly, Ashour connects the violence of the macrocosm and the microcosm. Sometimes the link falls along the line of cause and effect, but mostly, it is seen as a correlation rather than a relation of causation. Secondly, Ashour's narrative breaks the binary of

villainous/virtuous while still creating a strong sense of identification. (burden of ideal-cite lecture) Lastly, Ali murders a Castilian soldier in a struggle when he escapes from the line of deported Granadan citizens. The death of Cáuzar and Salsabil, the relationship of Ali and Fedda, of Ali and Nayat, and the affair Hasan has with the dancer (in Book 1) should be acknowledged because criminality and imperfection should not be seen as exclusive to Muslims or completely uncharacteristic of Muslims. Islamophobic stereotypes operate along the binary of villain and virtuous.

No other Muslim in the novel kills their child. Gender violence is linked to the family's tribalism and misogyny amidst an environment inundated in suspicion, secrecy, and fear. The box Ali made for Cáuzar is never filled. She is never able to pass it on to her daughter or fill it with her treasured items. She begins her married life with Sancho. Her box remains empty. The reader knows the future of that box, and how it was cut short, how Cáuzar was killed shortly after giving birth to a girl. The third *sunduq* is linked to a future lost to violence.

There are three physical boxes, but the trilogy ends with one final *sunduq* melded with the image of Maryama's final resting place in the imagination of Ali. Ali sees the last, imaginary *sunduq* in a dream at the end of the third book, *La Partida*, and this image inspires him to depart. Like his grandmother, he does comply, and he does not comply. The Edict of Expulsion is the last Castilian text the novel undermines and destabilizes. Rather than departing from the resting place of his ancestors, Ali departs from the shoreline and turns to walk back inland. We find hope in the ambiguity and the unknown because we can imagine a happy ending for Ali.

Another very important aspect of the *sundugis* that two out of three are explicitly linked to the lives of women. There are only a few papers that Ali takes out of Maryama's chest when the Moriscos of Granada are forcibly moved to other regions of Castile's territories. One of the items Ali keeps with him is Maryama's green Quran. The *sundugis* is one more symbolic illustration of the deep connection between Maryama and Ali because all of the factors as mentioned earlier- the Quran he takes with him, like the stories which fill his imagination and self-conception, and the *sundughe* buries in the courtyard garden of the house in the Albaicín- show how Maryama's care and love for him most heavily influences Ali's life and Ali's secret identity as a Muslim. If we revisit the image of trees cultivated as metaphors for Ali's life and connection to the spaces he inhabits—the roots of his identity stem from Maryama, and the *sundugis* is one aspect of that identity. Brian A. Catlos has written about the powerful and pervasive influence of Muslim women over their family's lives in his book, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom c. 1050-1614*. Maryama is a perfect example of the cultural power Catlos writes of:

...Muslim women were, in many ways, the true guardians of Islam and Islamic culture among the subject communities of Latin Christendom. It was women who raised children, who prepared food, and organized festivities, and who provided basic moral, social, religious, and language instruction to young *mudejares* and Moriscos—fundamentals of that unwritten, quotidian culture that underpinned subject Muslim identity and fomented communal cohesion. It was largely women who shaped and carried the rites and rituals that marked the distinct phases of one's passage through life: birth, marriage, and death. In defiance of the law, they taught their children to pray and perform the *salat*, and washed the dead - even circumcised boys.

Moreover, women's religious and scientific knowledge was sophisticated and respected. Both those who served the Christian aristocracy and their own communities as midwives, were powerful figures, and even in the male-dominated world of Islamic jurisprudence there were women, like Nuzay Calderan

and the “*mora* of Ubeda,” who gained considerable renown. For each of these exceptional figures who made it into the historical record, there must have been scores more, operating on a local level, who did not.<sup>102</sup>

Though Hasan teaches Ali how to read and write in Arabic, the bond between Ali and Maryama is the strongest relationship, and Ali’s memories of Maryama are constantly with him even after her death. In his moments of greatest distress, Ali always sees his grandmother. Moreover, he dreams of the peaceful resting place of his grandmother when he decides to turn away from the shore.

### **The Forgotten, The Unaccounted For**

The *Memorial* of Francisco Nuñez Muley is a critical document which Ashour incorporates into her fiction at this moment—a petition by a Christian of Muslim descent (a Morisco) pleading the case to preserve the cultural practices of the Morisco community which he argues would not undermine the practices of the Christian faith. The document of Muley crosses multiple boundaries as its contents circulate among the community members. Ali summarizes the full document orally for the benefit of Maryama, as the content of the document circulates orally in the Albaicín.

Firstly, a written text is disseminated through oral form to spread the nature of its contents.<sup>103</sup> Secondly, the original document is written in Castilian, and while Ashour’s original fiction was written in Arabic, we can imagine Ali communicating the contents of Muley’s petition to Maryama in Arabic as well. Lastly, the document does not just

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<sup>102</sup>(Catlos 506-507)

<sup>103</sup>(Comendador 366)

represent the elite classes. Maryama felt out of place when she was in the mansion of doña Blanca because she sees herself as *gentecorriente*, a person from among the common folk.<sup>104</sup> When she hears what Muley wrote down in his *Memorial*, Maryama feels like he is truly speaking on her behalf: “it was as if that man had not forgotten her, as if he were referring to her, to Maryama specifically.”<sup>105</sup>

Maryama feels like her needs have been accounted for, not to be forgotten. This phrase communicates the importance of both Muley’s *Memorial* as well as Ashour’s fiction. By conveying the impression Muley’s protests have on Maryama, Ashour’s fiction emphasizes its importance in conveying the reality and needs of *gentecorriente*, ordinary people, like Maryama. The reader experiences the reception by the people it was meant to speak for. The second novel shows a marked contrast with the first because in the experience of protagonists like Maryama, the Memorial of Francisco Núñez Muley is the first Castilian document that speaks for something she wants or needs, and it is described as a powerful moment in Ashour’s writing. Maryama is so impressed by how her protests have been echoed within the writing of Muley, that she is spellbound as Ali describes the written petition. She asks for the name of the writer, memorizes it, and proceeds to pray for Francisco Núñez Muley every morning and evening with her daily prayers. Ashour shows what a powerful and gratifying feeling it is for Maryama to finally have some form of a *portavoz*, a representative or spokesperson, who understands her and the community-especially the members of the community, which are so often forgotten.

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<sup>104</sup>(Comendador 337, Comendador 330)

<sup>105</sup>Era como si aquel hombre no la hubiera olvidado, como si se estuviera refiriendo a ella en concreto. (Comendador 367)

The family of Abu Jaafar secretly chooses to continue practice following Islam, but it is important to point out that the Memorandum of Francisco Núñez Muley is an important document from our shared past, which highlights nuances of differences in expressing a religious identity and a cultural or regional identity. The phenomenon of forgetting, or rather, becoming one of the forgotten, is one factor Ashour's representations of her characters within the narrative actively work against. The novels depict public spaces in which rituals of identity are replaced by rituals of violence and erasure. Space, storytelling, and violence blend together in a haunting form of repetition within the narrative. The creation of this repetition becomes the presence of a sort of ritual. Ashour uses the details of space, sound, and vision to show how the conquest, occupation, and the forms in which the family witnesses, resists, and receives the rituals of violence and erasure. The space Abu Jaafar once traversed becomes the space where his books are burned, where his granddaughter is put to death, where his adopted apprentice Saad witnesses and dies from the trauma of his wife's death.

Ali does not tell Maryama when the efforts of Francisco Núñez Muley fail to have their desired effect. He waits, and hopes for some good news to convey to Maryama as he, like the rest of the community, hopes that one of the new campaigns to preserve the cultural freedoms of Granada will have some effect in solving the issue at hand. After Muley's attempt does not succeed, the reader learns from Hernando Benamar, the affluent Morisco of the community, how the community forms a commission to speak to the governor of Granada in order to have the governor himself explain the situation to the king but their efforts were also fruitless. This is when Siddiq's commentary in his

reaction reminds the readers how the community is perceived by the authority which surveils, sanctions, and strangles them under such prohibitions.

Siddique heard him speak and murmured: It is futile to continue. Why would someone be just with his enemy? How can one expect to be aided in one's misfortunes by the one who was the cause of those same misfortunes?<sup>106</sup>

The words of Siddiq relay how Castilian authorities still doubted the sincerity, and more importantly, the political loyalties of the *Moriscos* despite their conversions. Ashour's fiction shows how the family navigates social injustice and the violent destruction of their cultural heritage, enslavement and murder of friends and family, and an overwhelming defeat of the community. Ashour fills this negative space with the topology of experience and with the striking ability of the community to negotiate and resist the external pressure being mounted against them. Abu Jaafar would meditate on the ages of texts and engage in ritual actions of creation. He would create beautiful calligraphy and titles and bind together pages filled with the cultural capital, which represented real wealth to be inherited by his descendants. Hasan can learn Arabic under the best *faqih* (Islamic religious teacher), and we see him pass on his Arabic to Ali. Saleema's life was also a sort of apprentice as she harbors the same affection and love for the written words which were treasured by her grandfather. Ashour shows how Abu Jaafar's descendants inherited his values and live them even with the increasing restrictions upon Muslim identity. Moreover, of course, Ali's identity and imagination are shaped by Maryama's oral knowledge and her creativity.

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<sup>106</sup> Siddiq lo escuchó hablar, murmuró: "De nada vale empeñarse en esto. ¿Cómo va a ser justo con uno su enemigo? ¿Cómo ha de esperar que lo socorra en sus desdichas quien fue causa de ellas?" (Comendador 368)



Maryama uses her storytelling to protect Ali as a child when she does not want him to be marked by the history of violence. When Naeem returns asking after Saad and Saleema, Maryama instantly hesitates for fear that Hasan may openly discuss the circumstances of their deaths in front of Saleema's and Maryama's grandson, Ali. Ali is the child of Hicham and Aysha. This is the moment when the reader first learns of Saad's death, and at this moment, the narrative confirms that Saad witnessed the death of his wife. Saleema was uncertain when she distinguished the voice of Saad, calling her name from the noises of the crowd. Saad witnesses the burning of Saleema the same way Abu Jaafar dies after witnessing the burning of the books. Saleema's death, Saad's death, and Maryama's story form a constellation of events that readers recognize.

At the thought of the violent flames burning in Saad's terrified eyes, Maryama uses a story to literally and figuratively carry Ali away to another room-to a happier place-when she lets him choose any story he wants to hear. The death of Saleema is a repetition of the burning of the books. The death of Saad upon witnessing her death is a repetition of the death of Abu Jaafar after he witnesses the burning of the books by Cisneros. The rituals of violence mark the reading experience of Ashour's trilogy, but Ashour's fiction answers these erasures and refills them with the cultural inheritance of Abu Jaafar's descendants. Ashour answers back to the memory of death and destruction as rituals of violence and retreats from that space of violence with rituals of identity. The way Maryama lures Ali out of earshot with a story is a repetition of the way the third trilogy ends with Maryama telling Aysha a story. The story Maryama started recounting in the first book is also a spatial reimagination as she tells her of a tree in Paradise. In that

imagery, we imagine the people like the leaves of a tree. It is a beautiful way to imagine the individual as a part of the collective. The image of the tree is a beautiful contrast with the image of flames and death.

The story which is left open and unfinished at the end of the first trilogy is an indication that Maryama will be the source through which the generations of Ali and Aysha will be shaped in terms of their spatial conception, imagination and spiritual identity. In the story, Maryama tells Ali, Maryama conjures the most essential constructed space in the Islamic communal identity, and space speaks against erasure through naming the victims of social injustice. When Maryama heard of the *Memorial*, she felt represented and remembered in all the petitions Muley makes on behalf of his community.

The story Maryama uses to carry Ali away from the conversation of Hasan and Naeem is a significant elaboration in Ashour's representation of space within the trilogy. The story transforms the perceptions and dreams of Maryama and the reader by replacing the ritual of violence, the erasures, and absence, the death, and departure of family members with a vision of return—an image of waiting for the ones she loves. In Maryama's story, she describes the Kaaba of the Hijaz, with its black velvet curtains, adorned with letters in gold and silver, as the edifice to which all people gravitate towards, overjoyed to stand before it and gaze upon it (Comendador 303). She describes how one day, a legion of angels descended to the Kaaba carrying large chains in order to lead away from the Kaaba and hide her away in Paradise in order to await the Last Day. The Kaaba has a voice and refuses to go to Paradise without the ones who should

accompany the Kaaba and the Angels- people who are beloved to the Kaaba. When asked by the Angels who those people are, the Kaaba responds:

All the victims of injustices on this earth. Wait, and I will tell you all who they are so that you may go and bring them, and so I will accompany them to Paradise. Then such bulky chains will not be needed, because my friends are many. They will go forth with me, and I will show them the way.<sup>107</sup>

And then Maryama continues to narrate and tells Ali:

the Kaaba stays on earth to continue naming the ones loved, and time passes by. A hundred years pass by, and the Kaaba continues counting names, and the Angels waiting. A thousand years pass by, and the Kaaba continues counting names, and the Angels waiting, and then.<sup>108</sup>

In the story of the Kaaba of the Hejaz, she reimagines space with a voice, a memory, an agency, and space is a witness who will not forget the ones who are suffering-the people like Maryama and her family members. In the first book of the trilogy, the narrative enters the consciousness and frames the fiction with the visions of Abu Jaafar, and Naeem, Saad, Saleema and Hasan, and their visions (and visual memories) communicate the oppressive sensation of the occupation- trapped, surveilled, caged and labeled (with new Christian names). Here, the story Maryama tells Ali is more of a comfort to herself, as Ali knows nothing of Saleema or Saad's passing. She uses her imagination to protect herself and her grandson from the horror of the past.

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<sup>107</sup> "Todas las víctimas de injusticias que hay en la tierra. Esperad y os diré quiénes son para que vayáis y los traigáis, y así yo los acompañaré hasta el Paraíso. Entonces no harán falta cadenas gruesas, porque mis amigos son muchos. Ellos cargarán conmigo, y yo les mostraré el camino." (Comendador 304)

<sup>108</sup> "Y la Caabafuenombrando a los que ella amaba, y pasaron cien años, y la caabaseguía contando, y los ángeles esperando. Pasaron mil años, y la Caabaseguía contando, y los ángeles esperando, y entonces..." (Comendador 304)

The image of the Kaaba, the most sacred space in the Islamic faith, speaking for the oppressed, and refusing to don the chains the Angels bring forth is a visual echo of the other bodies we see in chains throughout the trilogy. The reimagined space of the Kaaba speaks and identifies with the unidentified bodies of people paraded and persecuted in public spaces of Granada. Every descendent sees a new body marching with metal on their feet. The Kaaba's speech brings this image of chained bodies and echoes solidarity in the persecution of the family members of Abu Jaafar witness, beginning with the unnamed woman from the first book.

Ashour describes a vision of the woman through Abu Jaafar's gaze with a unique detail: when Abu Jaafar does not stop her in her path, he continues to observe her "slow and deliberate walking and the swaying of the golden anklets around the ankles which were splashed with mud from the street as her bare feet sank into the ground<sup>109</sup>," (Comendador 9). In the last line in the paragraph that describes the woman describes her feet. The anklets which once symbolized beauty, wealth, and happiness take on a darker meaning when her feet are sinking in the mud and marching towards death; in the trilogy, the reader continuously sees echoes of this image of, but the golden anklets are replaced by metal chains binding hands and feet.

The novel offers a counter reading of the spectacle of victory and conquest in imperial possession. Throughout the trilogy, multiple bodies pass through the text, and there is always attention drawn to the metal or chains around their feet or hands, and they

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<sup>109</sup>Abu Yáfar la dejó en el camino, observando su andar pausado y la oscilación de las ajorcas de oro en los tobillos salpicados por el barro de la calle en que se hundían sus pies descalzos. (Comendador 9)

are always walking-whether it is a procession or a line of prisoners. The reader comes to interpret the corporal posture of these bodies with the same dark meanings as Abu Jaafar and his descendants. The sequence of each appearance is essential, and it coincides with the way each descendant of Abu Jaafar witnesses a terrible spectacle of violence, destruction, and tragedy in the public spaces which fall under Castilian authorities. The spectacles and the appearances of these postures of prisoners of conquest appear as echoes throughout the text.

### **Uprooted and Scattered in the Wind**

In *La Partida*, the reader travels with the last of the descendants of Abu Jaafar, his great-great-grandson Ali. He arrives as a *forastero*, an outsider, to the village of Alyafería. Ashour narrates a flashback to what it was like for Ali before he found the village. Three passages at the beginning of the first chapter of *La Partida* display a stark contrast between Ali's experience of space and his great-great grandfather's experience. Firstly, after the exile of the citizens of Granada, he is entirely alone, and his condition is in direct contrast to the natural environment he observes around him.

He had arrived at the village twenty-seven years earlier. He had left Granada in the direction of Valencia in search of his aunt, a place to settle down. In Valencia they told him that his aunt had moved to a village, so they gave him the name and explained to him how to get there.

The route towards Alyafería took him towards the southwest. The summer was ending, and autumn was beginning. The rays of the sun were filtering through the branches of the olive trees. The vineyards stretched as far as the eye could see, and the earth turned a shocking hue of red until it no longer seemed like earth. As

well the vine shoots and olive trees, the earth was bearing forth blackberry brambles, lemon trees, orange trees, and prickly pears.

At times a treeless mound would rise before him, and in other moments there, it was a rocky mountain, and upon leaving them behind, the greenery of an orchard would emerge once again. Later on, suddenly, there were palm trees. He wondered, why would they be so pleasing to a traveler? Was it because they were fixed erect like the steady spears of his ancestors, or was it because the beauty soothed the solitude of the spirit when the gaze would contemplate the splendor of a palm grove with its branches crowned with palms and the clusters laden with fruit?<sup>110</sup>

Ali has been uprooted, exiled from his birthplace and the home of his ancestors, and so, he is in search of finding any form of connection as he tries to track down his aunt. This passage creates a metaphorical comparison between him and all of the olive trees, the vines, the blackberry trees, lemon trees, orange trees, and prickly pears he observes on his journey in search of a place to settle down. All of the vegetation is firmly rooted in the land it is born. This rootedness is the opposite of Ali's condition.

Not only are the palm trees rooted in space as Ali observes them, himself without roots, and without a home to rest, the palm trees also symbolize a continuity in time that

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<sup>110</sup>Habíallegado a la aldeaveintisiete añosatrás. Habíasalido de Granada rumbo a Valencia enbusca de sufía, de un lugaren el que asentarse. En Valencia le contaron que sufía se habíatrasladado a una aldea de la que le dieron el nombre y a la que le explicaroncómollegar.

El caminohaciaAlyafaeríatomabarumbosuroeste. Acababa el verano y comenzaba el otoño. Los rayos de sol perforaban las ramas de los olivos. Los viñedos se extendían hasta dondealcanzaba la vista, y la tierra era de un rojo que sorprendía, no parecían tierra. Además de sarmientos y olivos, de ellanacíanzarzamoras, limoneros, naranjos y chumberas.

Ante él se alzabaunas veces un cerropelado, otras una montañapedregosa y, al dejarlasatrás, surgía de nuevo el verdor de las huertas. Luego, de repente, las palmeras. ¿Por quéagradarán tanto al viajero? ¿Porque son enhiestascomo las firmeslanzas de los antepasados, o porque la bellezaalivia la soledad del espíritucuando el ojocontempla el esplendor de un palmeral con sus ramascoronadas de palmas y los racimoscargados de fruto?(Comendador 456)

Ali and his family have lost. As a traveler in constant motion, in a constant search for any relation, the palm trees become a pleasing sight because even as Ali wanders in search of a new place to put down some roots, the palm trees are a symbol of the continuity between past and present. The palm trees are pleasing to him because they stand upright as testaments to the past, to men and women like his ancestors who planted them and nurtured them to stand so tall. The palm trees also bear fruit. They create the seeds which usher the future growth of more palm trees and more fruit as well.

The clusters of fruit and the seeds they contain symbolize future time, just like the multiple generations and life cycles of a family (a family tree). Ali has been disconnected, cut off from his past and his future. His family has officially been denied any future in the land where they raised their family, and they made their home. Furthermore, when he arrives in the village, he is only met with more disappointment as his aunt's family has already moved to Fes. Ashour illustrates how lost Ali feels. The entire narrative shifts to the second person in order for the reader to be privy to the internal dialogue of Ali upon discovering the news.

You discover that the passage has no escape, you turn around with fluidity and direct your steps towards another that might take you where you want. And it is not a matter of a few steps upon crossing a street. Rather it is a long and rugged path that ascends between crags and which goes down to a river and disappears. You feel hunger and thirst, and you keep walking from Granada to Murcia, and from Murcia to Valencia. They tell you to go to Alyafería, you go on nourished by the hope of finally having arrived at the end of your journey, and then the sheik of the village tells you the latest news of their having departed, so you lose your nerve in the journey with this new information. You are turning back...and now...Where can your footsteps take you now?<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Descubres que el callejón no tiene salida, das la vuelta con toda naturalidad y diriges tus pasos a otro distinto que te lleve a donde tú quieras. Y no se trata de una calle que atraviese en unos cuantos pasos, sino de un camino largo y áspero que asciende entre

This passage emphasizes Ali's constant motion, and by listing the many places he passes through in order to find an end to his wandering, Ashour underlines a sense of *placeless-ness*. Where does one go when there is nowhere left to go? Ashour replays a dialogue in Ali's mind but the second person pulls in the reader to walk in Ali's shoes, and to truly contemplate how disoriented he has become at this point after such a long and rough journey alone, hungry and thirsty, and at the end, having nothing to show for it. Ali is no closer to finding a home. He was hoping to find his relatives after traveling through harsh terrain, but he is left with no clear direction, with nowhere to go.

Later on, it is only through his memory and his dreams that Ali can revisit the streets of Granada and the Albaicín: "during the day Ali would live his life with the people of the village, at night he would close the door, and the Albaicín would urgently return to his mind, with the Carrera del Darro and the markets of Granada. Nostalgia made him sad" (Comendador 460). When Ali decides to stay in the village, he spends his days learning the ways and customs of the community. Most of the villagers are agricultural laborers who pay tribute to a feudal lord in the form of tribute, and the economic, political, and social systems are all new to Ali as he was raised in the more urban environment of Granada's capital. Ashour's evocation of space is significant. His memory is anchored in the places and spaces left behind. Because the reader has lived in

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riscos, que baja hasta un río y se oculta. Pasashambre y sed, y continúa sandandodesde Granada a Murcia, y de Murcia a Valencia. Tedicen que vayas a Alyafería, vas hasta allí alimentando la esperanza de haber llegado al final, y entonces el jeque de la aldea dice tan fresco que se han marchado, cortándote el camino con esa noticia. Vuelta atrás. Y ahora...¿Hacia dónde diriges tus pasos ahora? (Comendador 458)



those spaces with Ali, Hasan, and Maryama, and later with the arrival of Naeem, the reader's memory of what Ali has lived through is also anchored in those spaces. Alone, enclosed at night, the spaces come to his mind *with persistence*, and the simple evocation of those spaces provokes an entire tapestry of memory for both Ali and the reader.

This is the reason Ashour can fill a few words with an intense depth of sensation. By the third novel, the reader had experienced multiple sensory experiences of Abu Jaafar's descendants in the specific spaces named- beginning with Abu Jaafar himself when he circumnavigated the city in the very first chapter of the very first novel of the trilogy (Granara 21-22). This is also why Ashour does not need to elaborate on *why* Ali is filled with nostalgia for those places. The entire narration has been anchored in the spaces, and Ali's unique, new condition of rootlessness after having been forced to leave his home is the cause for his nostalgia.

### **Witnesses of Erasure**

Ashour makes readers witnesses of what was and what was not. There was once a family in Granada - Saleema's books, Maryama's stories, Naeem's dance at Saad's wedding. The first novel immerses the reader in memory of how Muslims like Umm Jaafar and Umm Hasan could face extreme adversity and still actively work to keep a piece of their identity hidden safely away out of sight of the authority that made those rituals of identity criminal. In the first book of the trilogy, Ashour fills space with the sounds, scents, and sights one would see in Granada. As the narrative progresses through

the second and third novels of the trilogy, readers bear witness to the effects of the institutional gradation of erasures, which create absence in the spaces once inhabited by people like the family of Abu Jaafar. In the novel, the non-human elements and their descriptions are also given the power to communicate the weight of erasure. As Ali is wandering the countryside, his gaze rests upon a rock. What is significant about a rock? In the novels of Ashour, the nonhuman environment is also witnessing erasures. Nature is also a source of inspiration and reflection. When he later finds a town, the presence of nature is abundant, but all human traces only convey an absence.

A rock made him stop. He stood there astonished as he beheld it. It was an enormous piece of stone alone and firmly planting itself—but how could it?—on the zenith of the mountain. Part of its base was supporting itself on the peak, while the rest seemed to float independently in the air. He stared at it for a moment. It seemed firm. How was it possible that it had not been knocked over by the rushes of wind and water? Maybe a storm might come and displace it; maybe another might come and displace it even more and then a third that might strike it down, and this might provoke a terrible uproar upon rushing down the slope until reaching the abyss. Alternatively, maybe it would remain where it was, defying the storms and hurricanes, as it might be the will of God for this marvel to remain and for men to stop and stare, astonished and murmuring. “Praise be to God!”. He continued forward until finally entering a small village whose white houses were crowded against the mountainside. The birds were singing for the summer from the trees, which had branches filled with fruit. However, the place was deserted as if God had not yet created any creature. Nobody, no noise, nor any smoke which might indicate that some woman was preparing dinner for her husband and children.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Una roca le hizo detenerse. Se detuvo atónito al observarla. Era un peñasco enorme que se sostenía solo hincado—¿cómo podría?—en la cima de la montaña. Parte de su base se apoyaba sobre un pico, el resto parecía sostenerse solo o apoyarse en el vacío. La miró con detenimiento. Parecía firme. ¿Cómo era posible que no la hubieran derribado los embates del viento y el agua? Tal vez viniera una tormenta y la desplazara, luego otra que la desplazara un poco más y una tercera que la derribara; y provocara entonces un terrible estruendo al precipitarse pendiente abajo hasta el fondo. O tal vez se quedará donde estaba, desafiando las tormentas y los huracanes, porque fuera voluntad de Dios ese prodigio, para que los hombres se quedaran mirándolo atónitos y murmuraran: ¡Bendito sea Dios! ...Siguió adelante hasta meterse en una aldea cuyas casas blancas se

Forced to erase all markers of Muslim identity, Ashour shows the literal *erasure* undergone in both urban and rural communities of Spanish Muslims. Ali settles in the village after giving up the search for his aunts. The Inquisition pays a visit to the village of Alyafería after the mysterious disappearance of Cáuzar's sister, and the narration details the transformation of the village in *Taqiyya* as an entire community.

The village found out about the visit before it came. The news filtered in from neighboring villages. A nervous, bustling activity spread among the people, anxiety fed by fear, which overtook the community because of the passage of time, parents and grandparents had taught them to feel and understand that fear.

Anyone who had a Quran or a book written in Arabic would hide it; anyone accustomed to wearing a Tunisian robe or something similar, would remove it and save it away. The children's lessons would pause, and for the time being, families would warn the children to pretend and to be cautious. Some young Aragonese youths, who had come to study the customs and principles of Islam with Ómar El Xátibi, would go inside their homes and not leave. The henna sellers would gather their merchandise and hid it. Animals would no longer be slaughtered, all weddings, birth celebrations, and circumcisions would be postponed; the traditional songs of poetry would stop resonating throughout the village, just like the ringing of the tambourines and the music of the traditional oboe. The mediators for anyone who had disputes pending to be resolved would try to make arrangements and pacify tensions, to prevent that any anger, in a moment of carelessness, might let fly something or cause someone to say something that would end in disastrous consequences. If the visit fell on a Thursday, the people would postpone going to the bathhouse till another day; if it fell on a Friday, then the houses would cease to emit the aroma of spiced lamb, couscous and fried hotcakes because nobody would be cooking the customary feast for the special day of worship. Furthermore, for a time, the communal prayers would stop, as well as consultations on theological issues and ethics until the visitors arrived and then finally left.<sup>113</sup>

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apiñaban unas sobre otras en la ladera de una montaña. Los pájaros cantaban en el verano de los árboles, que tenían las ramas cargadas de fruto. Pero el lugar estaba desierto como si Dios aún no hubiera creado allí criatura alguna. Nadie, ningún ruido, ni humo que indicara que mujer alguna estaba preparando la cena para su marido y sus niños. (Comendador 409)

<sup>113</sup>La aldea se enteró de la visita antes de que se produjese. La noticia se filtró desde los pueblos vecinos. Una actividad tensa cundió entre la gente, una agitación alimentada por el miedo, que superaban porque el paso del tiempo, los padres y los abuelos les habían

By showing us all the elements of the communal identity being paused, hidden away below the surface and the care taken to avoid raising any suspicion, the narrative shows us how the village was, just like Saleema, *complying and not complying*, by still maintaining their collective identity as Muslims and then in collaboration, adapting themselves to temporarily put on an act, to play a necessary deception which would protect them, and their ability to live and exist as Muslims after the curtain falls. The text conveys that the community has done this before, now accustomed to performing the outward gestures and undertaking the necessary illusion for an impending audience-as they know their lives depend on keeping their secret a secret.

Ashour's fiction creates a retrospective space for rethinking and building on the imagination of hybrid spaces, whether those of post-Reconquest Mudejar architecture or those of post-conquest colonial occupation. The story shifts between the shores of

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habitado a sentirlo. Aquel que tenía un Corán o un libro escrito en árabe lo escondía; el que solía vestir una chilaba tunecina o algo parecido, se la quitaba para guardarla. Las lecciones de los niños se interrumpían, al tiempo que las familias los advertían de que debían disimular y ser precavidos. Algunos jóvenes aragoneses, que habían acudido para estudiar las normas y principios del Islam con Ómar El-Xátibi, se metían en sus casas y no salían. Las vendedoras de alheña del mercado recogían la mercancía y la ocultaban. Se dejaba de degollar animales, se aplazaban las bodas, las celebraciones por nacimientos y las circuncisiones; los *mawales*, cesaban de resonar por la aldea, al igual que el tañido de los panderos y la música de las dulzainas. Las personas sensatas mediaban entre los que tenían algún litigio pendiente y se esforzaban por arreglar la cuestión y apaciguar los ánimos, no fuera a ser que la ira, en un momento de descuido, soltase las lenguas y se acabara por decir algo de pésimas consecuencias. Si la visita caía en jueves, la gente aplazaba el baño para otro día; si caía en viernes, de las casas no salía el aroma a cordero especiado, a alcuzcuz y a tortitas fritas porque nadie cocinaba lo que era costumbre guisar en la virtuosa jornada del viernes. Y antes y después de esto se suspendía la oración comunitaria, así como las consultas sobre cuestiones teológicas y morales hasta que llegaban las visitas y se iban de una vez. (Comendador 466-467)

colonial America and the streets of Granada, as both the peninsula and the continent experienced imperial expansion under the crowns of Castile and Aragon.

#### Chapter 4: Erasures of Conquest in Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account*

Laila Lalami's novel, *The Moor's Account* (2014), gives a fictional voice to the historical figure of Estebanico and emphasizes the epistemic violence of *erasures* against multiple kinds of bodies— individual bodies, bodies of land, and metaphorical bodies of knowledge and culture. The outlet of fiction gives space to reimagine the colonial past through the consciousness of a man omitted in the official history. Reimagining this past speaks to the present. Estebanico was a Black Arab slave who was company and witness to the trials and failures of the 1527 expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez, and one of the four sole survivors who shipwrecked and lost in modern-day Florida, Texas, and Mexico.

The novel gives a retrospective account of the arrival of the expedition and retraces Mustafa's previous life in Azemmur, his fall into slavery, his conversion and life as a slave in Seville and then, his arrival to Florida as the slave of Andrés Dorantes de Carranza. Lalami reimagines the story of Estebanico from the traces of him found in the *Relación* of Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, also called *Naufragios* (1542). Mustafa names Cabeza de Vaca as his *rival* storyteller. The novel is a critical reflection on the multivalent nature of storytelling (and history) in both oral and written form, and the omission or suppression of voices lost or left unaccounted.

The title of Lalami's novel is a reminder of the overlapping nature of writing stories and writing history. In Spanish, the verb *contar* has two meanings: to count (objects of value) and to relay (i.e., a story, a joke, information). The Spanish word

*historia* denotes both a fictional story and history<sup>114</sup>. Estebanico is never allowed or asked to relate (*contar*) his story (*historia*) and is thus, and his perspective is omitted in the official history (*historia*). Estebanico's story does not count (*no cuenta*). That is because Estebanico is subaltern within the gaze and the Eurocentric framework of Cabeza de Vaca. Estebanico is visible when he is in service to or in opposition to the white, Christian protagonists of Cabeza de Vaca and Lalami's narrative. The subaltern Estebanico would not normally count among the men; he would be counted among the men's possessions due to his status as a slave in the expedition.

*The Moor's Account* presents us with the recuperation of identity and agency through the act of writing. Estebanico becomes the fictional Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam Al-Zamori, a name he reclaims in the preface of his account. Mustafa's account reflects on the potential for stories (both oral and written) to heal, harm, and transform the realities of individuals and communities. Mustafa is witness to transformations mediated through language and performed over silenced bodies as erasures of identity, history, and coexisting cultural frameworks. In his narrative, he reminds readers how stories affect how individuals frame and perceive their reality. In his writing, he reassigns his narrative to the spectacles and rituals of possession.

In this chapter, the rituals of possession are reread through the work of Orlando Patterson on social death in slavery to show how Mustafa views his transformation into Esteban by Castilian, Christian rituals of birth and possession as a form of social death. Mustafa heals the erasures through the language which imposed the original erasures. He

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<sup>114</sup>Cowart, David. *History and the Contemporary Novel*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989. Print.

remediates his social death by liberating himself in language. Every erasure and every remediation are undertaken by language in written and in oral form.

The past informs the perception of the present and vice versa. From the very beginning, the reader experiences time and space from Mustafa's perspective. The retrospective account alternates back and forth as Mustafa constantly links his remote past in Azemmur and Seville to his proximate past in the expedition after landing in Florida. His stories become a medium to transport him back to his memories of home in Azemmur, and stories also play a part in his survival.

No one is born a slave. Providing Mustafa with his own story and background is an essential element in using language to counter his subaltern status in the colonial narrative. The story of Mustafa, from his birth to his childhood, youth, and journey into adulthood with his sister Zaynab and his twin baby brothers, Yusuf and Yahya, becomes how the protagonist narrator undoes the erasures and the loss which placed him into the role of the subaltern. In the novel, the reader sees the impact of Mustafa's parents and their influence upon him as their eldest son.

Mustafa embodies the duality of written and oral knowledge and cultural heritage represented in each one of his parents. This duality of orality and written culture mirrors the ritual of erasures that Mustafa experiences when he becomes a slave and is baptized. Mustafa returns to the duality of written culture and oral culture by regaining his links to his parents by writing down his own story.

His father, Mohammed, works as a notary in Azemmur. As a well-trusted recorder of all sorts of legal and commercial contracts, his profession makes him witness and



privity to the most important private and public events in the lives of the people he serves. While Mustafa receives an education in the Quran and Shariah to follow in the profession of his father at his Quranic school, his mother, Heniya, nourishes Mustafa's mind and imagination with stories at home.

However, Mustafa harbors a skill and an interest in becoming a rich merchant rather than a simple recorder of other people's lives like his father (Lalami 35). Mustafa visits the *souq*, or marketplace, daily during his childhood in Azemmur. Eventually, Mustafa becomes greedy in his ambitions as a merchant and goes against his values and his family's advice when he begins selling slaves. He sells three men into slavery, but soon his fate comes full circle. His family witnessed the fall of Azemmur after the siege by the Portuguese, and they fall into economic deprivation during a famine. The famine leads Mustafa to decide to sell himself into slavery to try and save his family from starvation. Mustafa sells himself into slavery and is transported to Seville to be baptized and resold, but internally he maintains the desire to find a way to return to his home in Azemmur.

He never does return to Azemmur, but he creates a new home for himself as he falls in love with and marries the daughter of a healer, Oyomasot. When Mustafa and his fellow survivors find themselves in the hands of the colonial authorities of New Spain, he quickly realizes his only chance to create a life of freedom for himself, Oyomasot, and their unborn child is to write an erasure upon the figure of Estebanico. He takes his wife and serves as a scout and guide for a new expedition searching for the mythical cities of Cibola led by Father Marcos de Niza. At the end of the novel, Mustafa writes the fictional

death of Estebanico by sending a false report to Father Marcos de Niza. By writing the death of Estebanico, Mustafa writes his liberation.

As a work of historiographic metafiction, Mustafa's writing in Lalami's novel becomes a space of resistance against erasures as his perspective traces the limitations of Eurocentric historiography and temporality. Within the novel, storytelling is the means of commentary on the overlapping nature of history and fiction. Elements of truth and invention belong to both. The doubled nature of historiographic metafiction and its problematization of the nature of representation stress the interplay of the history which only shows the traces of a man named Esteban and the story which gives a voice, a family, a history, a set of traditions and cultural framework to a man named Mustafa through the imagination of fiction.

The spectacle of possession is naturalized within colonial narratives becomes denaturalized through Mustafa's immersive experience of the sights, sounds, and signs in language and gesture which surround him. Mustafa writes from a *locus of enunciation* located outside of the Eurocentric center of colonial discourse. Through his writing, he subverts his status as a subaltern to undo the silent, subsidiary role projected upon him.

In addition to making Mustafa write as a subaltern, Lalami's novel makes the reader pay attention to other forms of silence. As Mustafa tells his readers, silence makes him invisible to those who speak, but through writing becomes the space of resistance to articulate his perspective (Lalami 35). Esteban is a slave and as a subaltern figure deemed inferior and less than human without history or time. Lalami creates a voice through the silence of the subaltern. This reconstructed voice from the margins and the silence forms

a counter-narrative from the time, space, and narrative of the imperial imagination and the *erasures* of a colonial possession.

While Aronofsky's film recreates the silence, the darkness of an exotic, monstrous, mystic, transformative Other, the novel of Lalami reimagines the subaltern. The subaltern cannot speak, but through giving Mustafa agency in writing, Lalami problematizes the original site where the subaltern is made silent in the binary of Western Self and Oriental Other, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's originally commented on Antonio Gramsci's *subaltern* as figures inferior without social mobility, without agency to speak their history.

Mustafa is cognizant of silence and absence, which is stamped upon him through the external signs of discourses of power but reclaims his name, his identity, and his narrative of past, present, and future from the *erasures* stamped upon his body in spoken and written language. Though the reality of Esteban's life can never be known unless more historical evidence is found and confirmed to tell his story, fiction becomes a space to remember the multiple truths amidst history, which can be lost and destroyed but still remembered within the realm of the imagination.

### **What's in a name?**

A language is an act of possession in both oral and written cultures. Mustafa possesses an acute awareness of the perception of difference assigned to him—his alterity and his status as a subaltern. Mustafa is cognizant of how his status came to be. Mustafa

tells his readers, in his own words, of how erasures mediated by written and oral signs in a foreign language and a foreign locus of enunciation. In the arch of the novel, the readers come to understand how Mustafa perceives his role as Estebanico, the discourse of colonial history, as a series of losses mediated in language. After Mustafa disembarks from the ship with Dorantes, he narrates his thoughts in reaction to when his master Dorantes calls out to him. There is an internal rupture with the external signs Mustafa sees assigned to him:

Estebanico was the name the Castilians had given me when they bought me from Portuguese traders—a string of sounds whose foreign-ness still grated on my ears. When I fell into slavery, I was forced to give up not just my freedom, but also the name that my mother and father had chosen for me. A name is precious; it carries inside it a language, a history, a set of traditions, a particular way of looking at the world. Losing it meant losing my ties to all those things too. So I had never been able to shake the feeling that this Estebanico was a man conceived by the Castilians, quite different from the man I really was.<sup>115</sup>

Who is Estebanico? Names are a source of erasure and a source of resistance. For Mustafa, Estebanico is a fiction, while Mustafa is a voiced reality with a unique cultural tradition, a family, and a past. Lalami magnifies the moment of a master calling to his slave and emphasizes the strangeness of the sound of the name in Mustafa's ears. The strangeness and the distance Mustafa associated with the name stand out when he describes it as *a string of sounds* without meaning and significance in his conception of himself. This distance also creates a doubling effect on his perception and the signs placed on him. It is the first image of erasure within the novel, and the name Estebanico marks Mustafa with an absence. Here Lalami accentuates the sound of the name as *grating*

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<sup>115</sup>Lalami, Laila. *The Moor's Account*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2014. Print. p 7.

because the name Estebanico given to him by the Castilians creates a painful detachment from his cultural inheritance: “a language, a history, a set of traditions, a particular way of looking at the world” (Lalami 3). Mustafa introduces himself properly in the preface of the account, and in so doing, he recuperates the conception of his own identity, history, and memory.

In the name of God, most compassionate, most merciful. Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds, and prayers and blessings be on our prophet Muhammad and upon all his progeny and companions. This book is the humble work of Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam Al-Zamori, being a true account of his life and travels from the city of Azemmur to the Land of the Indians, where he arrived as a slave and, in his attempt to return to freedom, was shipwrecked and lost for many years.<sup>116</sup>

This first naming gesture is a return to the narrator’s Muslim identity. Change imposed on the bodies of people and spaces through the gesture of naming carries an essential power of possession, which Mustafa repeats and inverts within this preface. Mustafa names himself and contrasts this act with the act of being named by others, by men whose language and traditions are foreign to his own. Within the transpired interaction between a master (human) and his slave (property), Lalami gives us the weight of the naming motif which pervades the novel. Estebanico is the name which signifies the erasure of Mustafa’s identity and belongs to the external aspect of his bondage to his master as a Christianized slave. Mustafa is the internal consciousness in Lalami’s fiction, while Estebanico is an external sign imposed upon him.

While Aronofsky begins with the letters of the Bible, Lalami’s narrator-protagonist begins the text in the same manner as the Quran begins and the same manner

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<sup>116</sup>(Lalami 3)

in which every Muslim begins every task—in the name of God. This preface initiates his representation as a subject, with an agency to write and tell his own story. It is only within colonial discourse that Estebanico is a voiceless subaltern, but as Mustafa, he can speak and write for himself.

His reclaimed name directly contrasts with the position he has within Cabeza de Vaca's narrative, where the name of Estebanico usually appears in conjunction with the names of his Spanish master Dorantes or companions like Alonso Castillo Maldonado as they remained together during their travels and for their survival. Estebanico is rarely named independently. This constant link where Estebanico is rarely named independently by name emphasizes his subaltern condition as a slave.

Besides these references usually linking Estebanico to his master Dorantes or Castillo, the characteristic that Cabeza de Vaca most frequently uses to name Estebanico without naming Estebanico is his corporeality, his negritude. Cabeza de Vaca refers to Estebanico as "el negro" when he leaves out his name and never actually refers to him as a *moro* (a Moor) since Estebanico has a Christianized name and thus does not have a Muslim identity in his account.

Lalami's fiction gives Mustafa a pen, a consciousness, and a story of his own. Though Cabeza de Vaca does name Estebanico by name on multiple occasions, Lalami's crafting of *her* protagonist gives him a *background*, a space of his own, a lineage, a home and most importantly, an identity separate from the one granted to him by limited, historicized representation written by others. The preface reconnects Mustafa to everything he lost when he became a slave: "a language, a history, a set of traditions, a

particular way of looking at the world” (Lalami 3). Most importantly, he recuperates his religious identity as a Muslim.

As Lalami closes the novel with her Acknowledgments as the author, she emphasizes how she has created Mustafa’s sensibility completely out of fiction because of the historical absence and the unknown which pervades the traces of Estebanico in Cabeza de Vaca’s *Relación*:

Although I have based this novel on actual events, the characters and situations it depicts are entirely fictional. This is especially true of my protagonist, about whose background nothing is known, except for one line in Cabeza de Vaca’s relation: *el cuarto [sobreviviente] se llama Estevanico, es negro alárabe, natural de Azamor*. (“The fourth [survivor] is Estevanico, an Arab Negro from Azamor.”)<sup>117</sup>

Cabeza de Vaca’s story is also the story Lalami is competing with because the official history reduces Estebanico to mere traces of a man, and he is a *type* rather than being identified as a person: a name, a place of origin and his being a black Arab. Estebanico and Cabeza de Vaca’s text is a presence characterized by an absence, like an empty sign despite his constant presence. In Lalami’s novel, Mustafa is the one who names and identifies Cabeza de Vaca, rather than having it the other way around.

This gesture of naming (renaming) is a consistent ritual of imperial erasures upon bodies of land, of knowledge, and people. As Tzvetan Todorov points out in his work, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, a nomination is possession (28). Todorov writes: “the first gesture Columbus makes upon contact with the newly discovered lands (hence the first contact between Europe and what will be America) is an

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<sup>117</sup>(Lalami 324)

act of extended nomination: this is the declaration according to which these lands are henceforth part of the Kingdom of Spain (28).

Names became misnomers. Incomprehension and illegibility prevail as signs and sounds communicated become miscomprehended, disregarded, and misinterpreted. Todorov uses the hermeneutic behavior of Columbus and his role as an “interpreter” of the signs of reality as a primary example of this prejudice of perception as he also dissects the true epistemic modes which drive attention and values of Columbus against the reality before him (3-33). Todorov describes the naming process Columbus partakes in for each body of land he sets his gaze upon. His names assigned all pertain to Christianity. As Todorov explains, even for his contemporaries, Columbus has a largely “medieval” mindset because of his mission to extract material resources to finance a new Crusade for Jerusalem. It is one thing to assign a foreign land with names from a foreign faith and a religious worldview. Mustafa recenters himself as an agent of his representation to remedy the erasures imposed on him. Naming plays a central role in Mustafa’s decolonizing of his own identity. Naming recenters Mustafa as the speaking and interpreting agent who can represent himself.

...the concern with the representation of the colonized focuses on the discourse of the colonizer, and one forgets to ask how the colonized represent themselves, how they depict and conceive themselves as well as how they speak for themselves without the need of self-appointed chroniclers, philosophers, missionaries, or men of letters to represent (depict as well as speak for) them.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>(Mignolo 332)



Mustafa's identity is displaced through erasures upon his body and identity being beginning with the moment he sells himself into slavery, for fifteen *reais* to two Portuguese merchants who offered ten (Lalami 82). When he enters slavery, Mustafa's name, status, and religion are lost. As a slave, he loses the power to assert his sense of self, his past, his thoughts, and emotions. This image of naming as erasure mirrors the creative/destructive nature of imperial discourse, foreign signs, and meanings imposed upon bodies of people and land seized in the name of territorial, commercial and religious expansionism. The discordance of those signs and meanings upon the body receiving them intensifies through the first-person narrative that gives the reader insight into Mustafa's thoughts and confusion for the external processes of possession he is experiencing.

Lalami explores the capacity for marginalized identities, perspective, and even marginal temporality to challenge the dominant, accepted paradigms of being, seeing, and moving through the time of the chronicle of conquest by giving Estebanico a constant self-awareness of his reduced status among the Spaniards. The darkness of this corporality—his negritude—marks his marginalization. But Mustafa is self-aware of his position in the shadows and the marks of his body. Lalami replicates the naming gestures of Cabeza de Vaca in his various usages of Estebanico's name coupled with "nicknames" like "el negro" but layered in the center of consciousness of her protagonist in his reflections on his relationship with his master:

Pavo Real was the nickname Señor Dorantes had given to Señor Narváez, because the governor took as careful care of his appearance as a peacock. But my master had no nickname for me. A nickname is something you use to tease someone, whether out of spite or out of affections, whereas all the things he called me were

said without a hit of humor or irony: El Moro, El Negro, El Árabe. On most days, he did not even call me anything he did not need to—I was always right behind him.<sup>119</sup>

Mustafa has no identification with nor affection for the *names* given him because they carry none of the *history* or the *connection* he had cited before, rather this reduced system of nomenclature of Dorantes serves to push Mustafa to the fringe rather than bringing him into the fold. The *things* Dorantes calls him are just that; they are *things* rather than *names* or even *nicknames* which communicate how little Mustafa counts for as a person, so little that he need not be referred to by name. And of course, the depth of Mustafa's dehumanizing position as a slave is most deeply communicated in silence—when Dorantes does not call him anything. It is not just a matter of not acknowledging him; it is the marked silence an owner has towards his possession, like a pair of shoes.

The re-counting of Lalamí's novel of this named/unnamed figure reads against the narrative inclusion/exclusion of the treasurer of the expedition, Cabeza de Vaca, and Mustafa portrays his positionality among the other men as a metaphorical shadow territory, a space of silence and invisibility that is at once identified and also undone through his stories and Lalamí's fiction. The Mustafa's perspective deconstructs the veil of the colonial spectacle of possession and superiority. Concessions are made, and men who previously imitated Adam and Columbus by naming all the lands and animals they came upon are no longer interested in the act of naming, only in the means of survival.

When we came upon a river, none of the Castilians thought to give it a name, I noticed; they had stopped thinking of themselves as unchallenged lords of this

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<sup>119</sup>(Lalamí 49)

world, whose duty it was to put into words. Later, much later, whenever we spoke of this first river, we called it the Primero Río-not Río Primero, but simply the Primero Río, to distinguish it from the other rivers we would yet cross.<sup>120</sup>

They begin counting rivers rather instead of naming them. The change in speech acts indicates a more significant change to Mustafa. Mustafa reads the change in them. Mustafa's account undermarks the thought of being "unchallenged" because his entire account represents a challenge to Castilian imperialistic lordship over the story of this past, not just over the land. The sequence of the Spanish adjective "Primero" distinguishes the act of naming from the act of remembering. The Castilian language in this part now reflects an acknowledged experience and *locus of enunciation* as their reference to the river only reflects their own experience of it and nothing else—only reflecting their knowledge and not anything beyond that. The group traveling with Mustafa encounters three rivers in this chapter but this sequential counting rather than naming contrasts with the beginning of the expedition.<sup>121</sup> The act of naming returns to prominence once Castilians like Dorantes regain a sense of authority. Their sense of imperial epistemic dominance and authority returns according to their orientation in space and time.

Early on, that authority stems from the newfound roles of traveling healers as Mustafa and the other survivors move among the Amerindian tribes, but no longer as slaves or objects of exchange. The economy of their interactions also changes. For the treatments they perform, the payments they receive are grander and more honorable and

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<sup>120</sup>(Lalami 185)

<sup>121</sup>"Segundo Río" and "Tercero Río," Chapter 13, "The Story of the Three Rivers," are named for this change in naming convention. (Lalami 191).

are more like gifts or tributes rather than payments or simple trades. These gifts represent the characters elevating themselves within a different economic system, a gifting economy. They also usher a significant change in fortune from the time when they used to disassemble their garments and scant possessions for bartering. Small trinkets like Mustafa's cutting scissors or the beads would normally serve as items of exchange (Lalami 191).

The characters operate within a different system of knowledge as well, as shown in their relation to space. After the ceremony of the *Requerimiento*, the power of naming as erasure problematizes the *colonial semiotics* of one knowledge system over another. Within the arch of the survivors' their status changes from self-proclaimed Castilian conquerors to slaves, and then to merchants, and finally to respected healers only because they learn to navigate multiple knowledge systems—a key demonstration of Mignolo's *spluritopical hermeneutics*. Mustafa is our writer, and he is also our reader. He reads the changes in Dorantes, and it is he who recognizes the return of old habits in his former master. This moment in the novel also represents a great change in demographics for the former conquerors. The first village they encountered in the so-called la Florida was a deserted one. But as healers, they draw people to them and lead a following. There is a pathology in their presence, which has changed. They were once the source of disease, and they then become sources of healing.

In one of the villages we passed, a young boy who had been watching for our arrival was run down by a stampeding crowd and broke both his right arm and right leg. Broken bones were Dorantes's specialty—he had seen enough of them in the trenches of his king's wars—and he set to work right away. Afterward, the boy hobbled around on his good leg, shadowing Dorantes and running errands for

him. When it was time to leave, the boy's father, a trader by profession, gifted Dorantes five hundred hearts of deer. They were all perfectly carved, so that the holes from which the deer's arteries would have sprung were clean and neatly cut. They had been dried in the sun and now they were reduced to small dark things that made great rattling sounds in the bags the porters carried. This was why, when we spoke of that village later, Dorantes called it Corazones. Only later did it occur to me that my Castilian companion had returned to the habit of giving new names to old places.<sup>122</sup>

Mustafa describes the war experience of Dorantes as one which was for "his" king, not "the" king. The king of Dorantes is not the king of Mustafa. Mustafa is constantly navigating competing authorities, but he is always cognizant of the fact that none of them is universal. This recognition helps remind Mustafa that what was can also return to be again, and this realization forces him to prepare for what might occur if the group does survive to return to space where Castilian imperial dominance reigns again (and to ensure that he will be a free man).

Lastly, this passage highlights the relativity and positionality of the temporality assigned to the "new" world discovered by the "old" world of European exploration. Ashour draws attention in the voice of Saleema when she sees the exhibition of Christopher Columbus marching through the streets of Granada.<sup>123</sup> This comment also highlights the strangeness as "the habit of giving new names to old places" may be a common practice of conquest. However, it is unique to Spanish imperialism, and it both imitates and derails the original image of Adam in Paradise evoked in both the Bible and the Quran. The trope of naming highlights the perception of space as "new," Edenic, and destined for the arrival of the conquering gaze. The perspective of Mustafa problematizes

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<sup>122</sup>(Lalami 245)

<sup>123</sup> (Granara 28)

the imposition Biblical imagery and narrative in settler colonialism upon non-Christian bodies, spaces and traditions of knowledge.

### **Reframing Time**

Within the secret, inner world to which fiction makes us privy to, Mustafa is still a Muslim. He still cites the Quran and uses the Hijri Calendar. Lalami gives Estebanico a religious identity as a Muslim man called by a Christian name, which reminds us of the secret Muslim identities of Abu Jaafar's family in Ashour's text. Using the Hijri calendar adds to a larger idea that runs through Walter Mignolo's critical work<sup>124</sup> and its fundamental notion of multiple ways of seeing, being, and knowing. The existence and memory of multiple conceptions of knowledge, time, space, and history run through Mignolo's work and is demonstrated in Lalami's fiction because the *locus of enunciation* (perspective) are multiple.

Lalami did extensive research on what the cultures, languages and epistemic frameworks Mustafa traverses might have looked and sounded like. She consulted information on the Karankawa Indians of the Texas coast, the Travels of ibn Battouta, and of course, the historical commentaries on the travels of Cabeza de Vaca by scholars Robert Goodwin, Alex D. Krieger and Andrés Reséndez (Lalami 323-324). To inform the narrative of conquest, which is problematized and deconstructed, Lalami used Lewis Hanke's analysis of the *Requerimiento*, *The Conquest of New Spain* by Bernal Díaz, and

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<sup>124</sup>Mignolo, Walter D. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality & Colonization*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014. Print.

Fanny Bandelier's translation of Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios* (Lalami 323).

Lalami works to destabilize the "natural" sense of chronology and teleology by incorporating an alternative temporal system as Mustafa organizes his conception of time around the Islamic Hijri calendar.

The incorporation of the Hijri calendar is a significant gesture of reframing temporality. Firstly, the Hijra diverges from the temporality of Cabeza de Vaca. In his work, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*, Mark Rifkin states how the insistence of shared time, or *coevalness*<sup>125</sup>, still subjugates Indigenous temporalities to "the idea of a shared present [which is], not a neutral designation but is instead defined by settler institutions, interests and imperatives" and for this reason, Indigenous temporalities need not be in sync with the imperatives of settler time.<sup>126</sup> In the very first chapter, Mustafa shows how he is in the same place, yet he is out of sync with his company upon arriving in Florida by connecting himself to a completely different sense of being-in-time.

The Islamic calendar was founded upon the migration of the first Muslim community escaping persecution from the city of Mecca to the city of Yathrib (modern-day Medina) in the Arabian Peninsula. The historical beginning of the Hijri calendar marks the historical migration made for the sake of preserving life and freedom to practice the Islamic faith. The first generation of Muslims who followed Muhammad (S) as a prophet was a small community and were persecuted and had to flee their home to

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<sup>125</sup>in Johannes Fabian's terms

<sup>126</sup> Rifkin, Mark. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. Duke University Press, 2017. P viii.

preserve their spiritual identity. Mustafa is aligning himself with a history of mobility in his communal culture and background as a Muslim.

The Hijri calendar is a constant link to that first migration, and Mustafa orients himself in his system of time, place, and history to begin his self-narrated account. Mustafa occupies the same time as Cabeza de Vaca, and yet he does not occupy the same conception of temporality. The transfer of European knowledge to the American continent consisted of a significant shift in the conception of time, space, and history, which resulted in epistemic erasure of indigenous temporal conception. Mustafa's organization of time doubly diverges from the dominant temporal framework by describing his own birth story in the second chapter. His mother told him the story of his birth, through this story transmitted to him, Mustafa returns to his origins and breaks himself out of the mold of the subaltern assigned to him and showing that he too has his past, present, and future. Mustafa was not born a slave. By returning to his unique background, he creates more distance for the reader between his truth and the signs of subaltern assigned to him by Dorantes and others. Mustafa's sense of time exceeds the sense of time and existence assigned to him by Cabeza de Vaca.

The way Mustafa navigates through time and space within his narrative are important elements in the subjectivity and voice of his role as our storyteller. Sensory details and temporal orientation anchor the rich internal world and perception Lalami creates for her character. Like the naming gestures, Mustafa's ability to recreate his conception of time is an element of Mustafa's agency in the act of storytelling for Lalami's novel and Mustafa's account. Mustafa's conception of time and place anchor a



narrative that deconstructs the tropes of conquest differently than the well-known account of Cabeza de Vaca. Ritual erasures of conquest are repeated and emptied of their intended meanings through Mustafa's eyes. The narrative alternates between the expedition and between his prior life beginning in Azemmur.

The alternating timelines of Mustafa's narrative show readers the multiple sites of his identity that become inextricably connected through his experiences, which represent repetitive gestures that are layered upon one another as each experience makes him recall another. This alternating dynamic, which goes back and forth between Mustafa's distant past in Azemmur and then in Seville and Mustafa's more immediate past in Florida, shows how the former informs the latter. Mustafa's past informs his present, and his experience of the present shapes the way he remembers his past. Within Mustafa's consciousness the reader can see how he makes use of and acts upon what Hayden White calls *the practical past*, "which all of us carry around with us in our daily lives and which we draw upon, willy-nilly and as best we can, for information, ideas, models, formulas, and strategies for solving all the practical problems—from personal affairs to grand political programs—met with whatever we conceive to be our present 'situation.'"(9).

The organization of the novel breaks away from a linear temporal model. There is no "timeline" within Mustafa's account. He still conveys a compelling, coherent, and well-connected narrative of change and repetitions of gestures and visions of conquest, which are problematic as they are framed through Mustafa's perception. This break from linear does indeed mirror the narrative, the intercalated structure of the Qur'an; Mustafa is a Muslim despite his outward conversion to Christianity. The Bible and the registry of

slaves in Seville are the two texts used in his conversion (both a spiritual and commercial transformation). However, within the novel, he repeats prayers and chapters from the Quran and Hadith. This alternative temporal framework serves to highlight the dynamic, symbiotic relationships between past, present, and future and how even the perception of time itself becomes a body of knowledge constructed (or erased) by a specific perspective.

Mustafa is the rival storyteller of Cabeza de Vaca. Mustafa, as a storyteller, recognizes the narrating agency in others—the stories of others different from himself. While Cabeza de Vaca titles each section with the action or event described, his section titles mirror the titles of *libros de caballeria*, the tales of chivalry, like *Amadís de Gaula*, which focus on the merits and trials of the central protagonist. Cabeza de Vaca never ceases to be the center of his narrative, which follows in chronological order according to the tribes he stayed with and the news he received of fellow survivors, and some chapters are much shorter than others. The organization of the chapters within *The Moor's Account* is presented explicitly as a series of stories within a story, resonating with the frame tale structure of Sheherazade's storytelling.

Mustafa's account is the frame tale through which the reader reaches a recognition of other stories of diverse knowledge systems and communities. The title of each chapter is titled as a story because Mustafa encounters diverse tribes with stories of their own. Mustafa's account goes back and forth in time and space, which fits within the format. Lalami's novel organizes the chapters as stories within a story—the same structure used by Scheherazade in *Arabian Nights* whose stories featured characters who would

narrate stories of their own.<sup>127</sup> This structure forces readers to identify with the perspective of Mustafa as well as drawing our attention to the texts outside of the novel for more critical readings of conquest narratives. Keeping in mind how the speaker's or writer's perception of novelty or difference would have been inevitably shaped through the filter of his/her own cultural perspective. By distorting the concrete sequence of chronological events within the back and forth structures, Lalami does not frame the novel in a linear schematic. Rather each chapter is pre-informed by the one it follows in order to give us an additional dimension to the nature of cultural filters and how stories can pre-determine human perception.

In addition to presenting the colonial discourse as an *illegible* imposition upon bodies of lands, peoples, and knowledge, Lalami interrupts the imposed conception of temporality by creating a text which breaks from a linear chronology. Within the chronology, which is organized by the rival storyteller and protagonist narrator, readers have multiple beginnings and multiple endings—further emphasizing the multiplicity of narratives and temporalities. Within the novel, Mustafa creates three different but co-existing beginnings and three different (competing) endings. The three beginnings Mustafa's narrative creates are as follows: 1) The Frame Tale in the Preface, 2) The Arrival: the proximate past starting with the Expedition, and 3) His Birth: the remote past starting with his family's heritage in Fes and Azemmur.

It is only through his training as an indigenous healer that Mustafa realizes the competing potentials of stories and their effects. After being trained by Oyomasot's

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<sup>127</sup>Mūsawī MuḥsinJāsim., and H. W. Dulcken. *The Arabian Nights: Illustrated*. Barnes & Noble Classics, 2007. Print.

father and returning to his knowledge systems to bring both sources into practice, Mustafa can perfect his craft and create a story that will free him in a literal sense. Here we play with the remembered and the forgotten, the erased and the suppressed, but it occurs on a double level, and Mustafa and Lalami both wield the pen to manipulate the intersecting fields of fiction, history, and myth.

### **Silent Bodies, Spectacles of Possession**

Language and corporality are inextricably connected in the transformative gestures of naming, speech, and writing upon silenced or absent bodies of land and water, flora and fauna, and in the bodies of people like Mustafa. Lalami compares the changes to Mustafa's name, status, and religion through his fall into slavery and his baptism with the parallel presentation of acts of possession performed in conquest. The novel emphasizes a similar tension seen in Ashour's trilogy: external spectacles in speech and writing presented with a sense of distance and alienation through the perspective of the internal subjectivities of the protagonists.

Mustafa's description of each erasure he witnesses creates distance and estrangement from the knowledge systems of the Castilian language, and Christian rituals of the colonizer's cultural framework result in a doubled perspective. Lalami makes the rituals and logic of possession of the Castilians strange and criminal through the eyes of Mustafa. Through the doubled narrative, Mustafa reassigns meaning to the gestures of

colonial narratives of possession. Mustafa's narrative counterpoises symbols of colonial possession and Christian rebirth with a narrative of social death and alienation.<sup>128</sup>

Readers see the first scene of colonial possession in the initial arrival and landing upon a fishing village at the beginning of the novel. When Mustafa arrives with Dorantes and a small group of officers and soldiers to scout a small village, this is the first scene in the novel where Mustafa's master and his company take possession of objects which do not belong to them and begin to barter actively and bargain for each other's stolen goods.

It was a fine morning in spring; the sky was an indifferent blue and the water was clear. From the beach, we slowly made our way to a fishing village one of the sailors had sighted from the height of the foremast, and which was located about a crossbow shot from the shore. My first impression was of the silence all around us. No, silence is not the right word. There was the sound of waves, after all, and a soft breeze rustled the leaves of the palm trees. Along the path, curious seagulls came to watch us and departed again in a flutter of wings. But I felt a great absence.

In the village were a dozen huts, built with wooden poles and covered with palm fronds. They were arranged in a wide circle, with space enough in between each pair of homes to allow for the cooking and storing of food. The fire pits that dotted the perimeter of the clearing contained fresh logs, and there were three skinned deer hanging from a rail, their blood still dripping onto the earth, but the village was deserted. Still, the governor ordered a complete search. The huts turned up tools for cooking and cleaning, in addition to animal hides and furs, dried fish and meat, and great quantities of sunflower seeds, nuts, and fruit. At once the soldiers took possession of whatever they could; each one jealously clutched what he had stolen and traded it for the things he wanted. I took nothing and I had nothing to barter, but I felt ashamed, because I had been made witness to these acts of theft and, unable to stop them, an accomplice to them as well.<sup>129</sup>

In Mustafa's perception of the village, there are many signs of life. One of the strongest indications of desertion is the skinned deer which are abandoned with their

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<sup>128</sup>Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1982. Print.

<sup>129</sup>(Lalami 6-7)

blood still dripping—the village life has been interrupted, and there is every indication that the inhabitants have evacuated their own homes. The Castilians never seek an exchange, and never question the clear signs of desertion. The soldiers take advantage of the absence of the villagers, and rather than seeking an explanation for the absence of the inhabitants of that village, and they take open license to possess and claim any object they perceive and desire. Mustafa's first impression of the *silence* and *absence* becomes a significant leitmotif within the novel because the bodies possessed within the narrative are perceived as silent, absent, empty, or destined to be possessed and claimed.

While the rest of the men are taking whatever pleases them, Mustafa is following his master and then stops out of curiosity to observe one of the fishing nets. Here Lalami adds an interesting twist to the official history, which is a completely plausible possibility for what *might have* happened. In Mustafa's version of the story, Mustafa is the one to find the small yet significant little pebble Cabeza de Vaca calls gold in his account.

Mustafa finds the odd little pebble in the fishing net, but when he holds it up to the light to try and discern what material it is, his master Dorantes catches sight of him and asks him what is in his hand. Mustafa replies that it is nothing, only guessing that it might be pyrite, but Dorantes snatches it and scratches it because though he is unsure, he realizes it might be gold, and he quickly decides to show it to Narváez (Lalami 7-8). After pondering over the pebble, Narváez applauds Dorantes for a job well done and decides to have the armada disembark all of the people, horses, and supplies to that very same beach.

Lalami emphasizes the crafted nature of narration through Mustafa's status as a subaltern. The omission of his actions is a plausible historical possibility. Mustafa receives no credit for the find. Later on, he does not want any credit because he ends up feeling extreme guilt and regret over the terrible deeds Narváez commits against two men he captures in his quest to find more traces of gold just like that odd little pebble. Narváez ends up finding, seizing, and torturing four Indian men while interrogating them to tell him where to find more gold—just like the pebble.

The empty village plundered demonstrates the material possessions seized without consent or concessions. When Mustafa finds the golden pebble among the fish netting (he never means to *take* anything), the narrative shows a different sort of immaterial possession by Dorantes over Mustafa. The finding of the pebble and the forced *absence* Dorantes imposes on Mustafa when he claims the glory for the find for himself is an event that emphasizes the subaltern status of Mustafa. Because Mustafa is telling us the story, the reader can feel the invisibility and passivity imposed upon Mustafa. Dorantes interprets Mustafa's every action in the service and for the utility of himself, and Mustafa knows Dorantes to be a vain person, so he is not surprised when he omits the fact that Mustafa was the one who found the gold.

Mustafa's finding the pebble does not need to be accounted for because, in the eyes of Dorantes and the rest of the party, Mustafa does not count. Mustafa's status as a slave, as subaltern, is a condition which he is constantly cognizant of, and while he always has to display an appearance of servility and obedience, the narrative gives a vivid picture of Mustafa's inner workings. When news spreads about the golden pebble,

Mustafa returns to his original position and stands *behind* Dorantes, “shaded from the sun by his shadow,” because Mustafa is constantly navigating and negotiating a discourse and a vision which is explicitly excluding him (Lalami 8).

The physical shadow Lalami paints in this image is symbolic of the metaphorical shadow of Mustafa’s status as subaltern— as a silenced possession, a slave. Lalami answers Spivak’s question but in the form of pointed rupture from the silent role of the subaltern. Lalami’s text creates his vision and conception of his alterity that looks back at the gaze and speaks back to the voice that places him within the margins, the shadows. Mustafa’s position in the background, *behind his master Dorantes*, is occupied consciously by Mustafa. Mustafa’s self-conscious position is a role he inhabits while observing the self-conception of his master Dorantes:

As for me, I walked where SeñorDorantes had told me to: at all times, I was to be one step behind him. He was not satisfied just to travel through this wondrous land and to seek a share of its kingdom of gold, he wanted a witness for his ambitions; he felt himself at the center of great new things and so he needed an audience, even when there was nothing for him to do but march.<sup>130</sup>

This description of Mustafa’s gaze, as a witness, plays upon the larger theme of his witnessing the expedition and giving a faithful account of the transpired events, but it also places a crucial distance between Mustafa and his role as a witness as well as Dorantes and his role of conqueror. This distance is made visible by Mustafa reading the desire within the performance of Dorantes, the desire projected upon Mustafa as a spectator. Dorantes needs an audience within his constructed narrative of himself and

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<sup>130</sup>(Lalami 10)



imposes his desire to make Mustafa disappear into his accessory role as subaltern Other. Lalami brings out this returned gaze of the Other in a similar sense to how Fatimah Tobing Rony has described this gaze in *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*.

Lalami draws away from the veil of this vision double over upon itself in Mustafa's attention to it. Mustafa can recognize the role relegated to him by his master in addition to recognizing the role Dorantes reserves for himself. Giving her character a heightened awareness of the subsidiary role he is supposed to *perform* for his master, Lalami's Mustafa gives a double-take to the events passed over quickly without detail in Cabeza de Vaca's text because Mustafa's narrative is also self-conscious of the imagined readers who have already encountered the text and testimonies of Cabeza de Vaca and the Joint Testimony of Castillo and Dorantes. Mustafa competes with those narratives and those testimonies. But the act of writing a vision of resistance is only made possible when Lalami writes for Mustafa moment of recognition of his "strangeness" in the Eurocentric, Civilized, Colonial Gaze. Lalami's narrative fiction serves as a site of resistance to the dehumanizing vision of the Other. Mustafa puts on the mask of the Other and *performs* his role, but the narrative is his voice, his vision, and, most importantly, his history. He is not closer to nature, nor is he closer to animal kind than humankind. But when the Castilians view him alongside the Indians, it is a speech act which (like the beginning of the novel) shows the readers external alterity in language, which bleeds into the internal conception of self. He is not a being devoid of history. He possesses a history of his own with his past and with hopes for his future.

*The Moor's Account* gives the narrating self of Mustafa and the opportunity to retrospectively recount the fully present thoughts, questions, and emotions of his experiencing self, which he is forced to keep silent like a slave to Dorantes. Through the written narrative, Mustafa is no longer *silent*. Only Dorantes is recognized for his status and agency, and immediately after the finding of the pebble, Lalami underlines the shadow Mustafa occupies, and the text subverts this vision of Mustafa as a possession as Mustafa is transformed as writing, reading, feeling and thinking subject with agency. Through his writing, Mustafa revives the inner world, which is made to seem *absent* through his status as a slave, and most importantly, he recounts his *reading* of the men and events of the story.

He has only been with Dorantes for a year at that point, but already he can “read” his master just by looking at the back of his head, a master whose feelings of anger and annoyance would always “translate into actions” towards Mustafa himself; so Mustafa is trying to make things easier for himself when he knows he needs to play the role which has been written for him in the shadow, “to remain quiet” and to make himself “unnoticed” as Dorantes can “bask, alone, in the glory of the find” (Lalami 8). Lalami’s fictional reimagining of an entirely plausible omission in the finding of that gold pebble reminds the reader how Mustafa, as a person, is wholly meant to be omitted as a slave. Mustafa, as a reimagining of Estebanico, is symbolic of all the other potential omissions and distortions which *may have* occurred within the official account.

Mustafa is cognizant of his role occupying the shadow of Dorantes. The novel accentuates his subaltern position beyond his relationship with Dorantes as well. In the

larger framework of the expedition, Mustafa's role is to mix into the background. In one moment, readers see a panoramic view of the social hierarchies of the expedition when the rest of the armada disembark. The description highlights how Mustafa and other slaves are only seen as possessions, not people.

As more and more people arrived, they somehow huddled around the familiar company of those closest to them in station: the governor usually stood with his captains, in their armor and plumed helmets; the commissary conversed with the four friars, all wearing identical brown robes; the horsemen gathered with the men of arms, each of them carrying his weapon--a musket, an arquebus, a crossbow, a sword, a steel-pointed lance, a dagger, or even a butcher's hacket. Then there were the settlers, among whom carpenters, metalworkers, cobblers, bakers, farmers, merchants and many others whose occupations I never determined or quickly forgot. There were also ten women and thirteen children, standing in throngs beside their wooden chests. But the fifty or so slaves, including this servant of God, Mustafa ibn Muhammad, were scattered, each on standing near the man who owned him, carrying his luggage or watching his belongings<sup>131</sup>.

Mustafa's observation paints a significant picture of Mustafa's place within the expedition and its social makeup. He has none. Mustafa has no position within the social and demographic makeup of the expedition party because he exists outside of the framework. Immediately after mentioning another detail of an inanimate object—the wooden chests in which the women and children keep their belongings—Mustafa mentions the slaves. The sequence of the narration is significant because the slaves stand with other belongings of their owners. The subaltern status is underscored in a visual image of the group of slaves, and the slaves are scattered because they do not belong to the group as social members; rather, their presence is completely subsumed and overshadowed by their status as possessions, standing by their owners. None of the

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<sup>131</sup>(Lalami 9)

slaves, scattered like the other possessions of their owners, count as subjects with the agency, will, and thought within the vision and discourse Dorantes espouses.

After the entire armada disembarks, Mustafa witnesses the full ceremony of possession, which is prefaced by another description of the tranquility of the natural space around them. It is late afternoon on the third day since their initial landing, and Mustafa notes how it is very quiet just before we see the notary as if she were meeting his cue upon a stage (Lalami 9). Lalami expands this moment in time in comparison to the narrative of Cabeza de Vaca, and the result is another sense of detachment from a ritual of possession. In comparison, Cabeza de Vaca passes over the moment as natural immediately after the gold is found. Mustafa's perception of the ceremony links to the theme of the spectacle of possession.

The notary of the armada, a stocky man with owlsh eyes by the name of Jerónimo de Albaniz, stepped forward. Facing Señor Narváez, he unrolled a scroll and began to read in a toneless voice. On behalf of the King and Queen, he said, we wish to make it known that this land belongs to God our Lord, Living and Eternal. God has appointed one man, called St. Peter, to be the governor of all men in the world, wherever they should live, and under whatever law, sect, or belief they should be. The successor of St. Peter in this role is our Holy Father, the Pope, who has made a donation of this terra firma to the King and Queen. Therefore, we ask and require that you acknowledge the Church as the ruler of this world, and the priest whom we call Pope, and the King and Queen, as lords of this territory.

Señor Albaniz stopped speaking now and, without asking for permission or offering an apology, he took a sip of water from a flask hanging from his shoulder.

I watched the governor's face. He seemed annoyed with the interruption, but he held back from saying anything, as it would only delay the proceedings further. Or maybe he did not want to upset the notary. After all, without notaries and record-keepers, no one would know what governors did. A measure of patience and respect, however small, was required.

Unhurriedly Señor Albaniz wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and

resumed speaking. If you do as we say, you will do well, and we shall receive you in all love and charity. But if you refuse to comply, or maliciously delay in it, we inform you that we will make war against you in all manners that we can, and shall take your wives and children, and shall make slaves of them, and shall take away your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can. And if this should happen, we protest that the deaths and losses will be your fault, and not that of their Highness, or of the cavaliers her present. Now that we have said this to you, we request the notary to give us his testimony in writing and the rest who are present to be witnesses of the Requisition.<sup>132</sup>

Mustafa has no idea whom the notary is speaking to until the very end. Mustafa uses one word to describe this ceremony: strange (Lalami 10). Again, Lalami offers a plausible historical moment by filling in the sensory details experienced by Mustafa. In comparison, the narrative of Cabeza de Vaca naturalizes the process of possession.<sup>133</sup> As Patricia Seed has written, Spanish historical colonial power would create reality through writing and recitation of the *Requerimiento* during the conquest. The written word created an aura of authority when combined with orality. As Matthew Restall mentions in *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, “Spaniards were concerned to justify their actions and give them a legalistic veneer by citing and following approved precedents,” and these precedents were three: reading out the document of the Requirement, declaring a formal territorial claim, and founding a town (which included naming the town) (19).

This tripartite process helps us see the connecting variables of writing, space, and power within the act of possession. To name a place was to possess a place. The ceremony Mustafa witnesses is an example of language as erasure upon space. As

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<sup>132</sup>(Lalami 9-10)

<sup>133</sup> Vaca Alvar Núñez Cabeza de, and Juan Francisco Maura. *Naufragios*. Ediciones Cátedra (Grupo Anaya, S.A.), 2010. Print.

Matthew Restall points out, the possession ritual always preceded the founding of a town—direct manipulation of the space as an act of possession. Restall echoes Lalami’s description of the speech as “legal justification” as he writes, “Spaniards were concerned to justify their actions and give them a legalistic veneer by citing and following approved precedents” (19). The use of the word *veneer* resonates with the scene in Lalami’s novel; Restall calls it a “veneer of validity,” and Mustafa’s account shatters the illusion this ritual is supposed to create (the illusion that the act of possession is natural) (19).

The reading out of the *Requerimiento* as a declaration of the formal territorial claim was followed by founding a town because city-dwelling symbolized civilization and security, after which a small group would be converted into the town *cabildo* (council) to make all legal decisions in governing that territory (Restall 19). Veracruz, Havana, and Santo Domingo are all examples of the ritual process that “figuratively marked the countryside as legally claimed and possessed” (Restall 20). Bodies converted and spaces transformed through language are critical examples of what Mustafa names as a vital action of the Castilian authorities he observes—to create reality through language.

Lalami emphasizes the speech act of the *Requerimiento*, specifically within her

Acknowledgments:

The speech read by the notary of the Narváez expedition in Chapter 1 is a shortened and modified version of the *Requerimiento*, a legal justification drafted by the Spanish jurist Juan López de Palacios Rubios in 1513. It was used in every Spanish expedition to the Americas from that year until its abolishment in 1556. It was read to indigenous tribes when they were present, but their presence was not required. The signed document was then sent back to Spain.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>(Lalami 223)

Names and signs imposed on Mustafa's body mirror the language and markers of empty signs written and recited through the *Requerimiento*. The *Requerimiento* is an important parallel to the Baptism ceremony of Mustafa because a combination of written and spoken language is used to justify the domination of bodies of persons and bodies of land. These signs are used even when no one is present to read or receive them, as Patricia Seed emphasizes in her comparative historical study of colonial *rites* of possession, this rite of the Spanish colonial protocol would often seem absurd in instances where the indigenous nations and communities addressed were not even present, as shown both in Lalami's novel and mentioned in Cabeza de Vaca's text (but without such an explicit acknowledgment of that absence).<sup>135</sup> The rite becomes an example of how the Castilians "gave speeches not to voice the truth, but to create it" (Lalami 10).

Images of conquest are linked within Mustafa's experience and memory as he recounts the fall of Azemmur to the siege of the Portuguese as he witnesses the Spanish read out the *Requerimiento*. In the repeated actions and gestures of possession performed over the indigenous bodies and lands in Florida echo and resonate within the perception of Mustafa to remind him of the conquest of his own home, Azemmur. This continuity of the nature of conquest, rhetoric, and images that are carried over through multiple reenactments is a phenomenon that is conceived as almost a form of *deja vu* in the mind of Mustafa. This mirroring of present experience and memory across unique moments in colonialism is a key example of transcolonialism, "the shared, though the differentiated,

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<sup>135</sup>Seed, Patricia. *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World: 1492-1640*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Print.

experience of colonialism and neocolonialism (by the same colonizer or by different colonizers), a site of trauma, constitution the shadowy side of the transnational” (11).<sup>136</sup>

The recital marks the *imagined* space with the myth of empty land or virgin land (McClintock 30). Patricia Seed describes the history of this ritual. Castilians appropriated the *Requerimiento* from the conquest of the Arabs in the peninsula. Similarly, the cross was a symbol adopted to simulate continuity with the Christian Roman Empire.<sup>137</sup> In the gaze of Mustafa, gestures, and signs of conquest are constantly shown to repeat themselves in similar and dissimilar forms.

Mustafa’s account communicates the dissonance between experience and language-specifically the language which justifies possession. The language of the *Requerimiento* makes it seem as if there is an audience who understands the words being recited at the moment, but Mustafa’s account reveals the reality that is hidden in official language and procedures. This connects to Mustafa’s account contradicting the Joint Report. In the Joint Report, the novel dissects the ability to use language to conceal realities and omit important details. Since language is the site of erasures, Mustafa uses language to problematize those same erasures within his writing.

Mustafa sees the customs of the Spaniards as strange and violent. The narration after the recital of the *Requerimiento* follows with the raising of the flag.

The captains inclined their heads, and a soldier raised the standard, a green piece of fabric with a red shield in its center. I was reminded of the moment, many

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<sup>136</sup> Lionnet F, Shih S-mei ed. *Minor Transnationalism*. Duke University Press; 2005. Print.

<sup>137</sup> (Seed 180)



years earlier, when the flag of the Portuguese king was hoisted over the fortress tower in Azemmur. I had only been a young boy then, but I still lived with the humiliation of that day, for it had changed my family's fate, disrupted our lives, and cast me out of my home. Now, halfway across the world, the scene was repeating itself on a different stage, with different people. So I could not help feeling a sense of dread at what was yet to come.<sup>138</sup>

The *Requerimiento* also links to the ritual of Baptism. Mustafa sees an entire village lose their sovereignty without their voices being heard, and we see the bodies of a mass conversion marked in silence. We, as readers, also experience a form *deja vu* as Mustafa does. For Mustafa, the *Requerimiento* reminded him of the siege of Azemmur. It brought an image back to his mind.

The narrative of the Baptism in Seville is seen completely through Mustafa's eyes, witnessing the silent (virtually absent and emptied) bodies of slaves *converted* without questions, without voices in dialogue or resistance. Up to this point, the reader has co-witnessed an accumulation of gestures in language that Mustafa's pen articulates when he writes of Seville. It is written memory of the Baptism within Mustafa's narrative, which brings readers the articulation of what the *Requerimiento* in La Florida, the flag at Azemmur, the conversion of Seville, and the renaming of Mustafa into Esteban all signify: a series of erasures.

Mustafa narrates a chain of parallel ceremonies of language, which can be visual language such as the staking of a flag or even language completely incomprehensible, such as the words uttered by the priest in Seville before the unnamed (renamed) mass which includes Mustafa. The idea of a marked absence seems like a paradox, but this

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<sup>138</sup> (Lalami 10)

paradox seen in the ceremonies of possession connects to the process of social death in Orlando Patterson's discussion of rituals of enslavement.

### **Social Death and Narrative Rebirth**

The novel's strongest counter-discourse to the imperial imagination of domination over the body and soul of Mustafa is the construction and deconstruction of narratives and symbols of birth, rebirth, and death. Mustafa's perspective shows enslavement as social death. Within his narration, Mustafa describes the rituals and language which inscribe him into slavery as a series of erasures. The unique form of erasures that stem from slavery must be delved into further to understand the process of regeneration and recuperation Mustafa performs through language in his writing. Mustafa's writing is a means of undoing the social death imposed on him after he sold himself into slavery.

In *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, historical and cultural sociologist Orlando Patterson explains that a slave was defined by the slaveholding society as a socially dead person who did not belong to the community and had no social existence outside of his master (38). In his work, Patterson emphasizes that slavery was not solely a result of external sources like conquest because though such an external mode of "recruitment" was dominant, many societies also "recruited" slaves from within (39). He cuts across diverse cultural contexts of slavery and describes two major modes used to conceive slavery as social death: the intrusive mode and the extrusive (39). The intrusive mode of representing a slave in society was the ritual incorporation of an

individual defined as a foreigner, a permanent outsider, or a defeated, captured enemy. In the extrusive mode, an individual was seen as an insider who had fallen in status, ceased to belong to the community, or had been expelled for breaking with social or legal norms (41). Mustafa becoming a slave and then being baptized, and renamed as Esteban fits within the intrusive mode of slavery. Patterson explains that, in premodern slaveholding societies like medieval Christendom, Christians could enslave fellow Christians, and conversion would not oblige one to free a slave (41).

Social death occurs through symbolic ritual expression. It is paradoxical because the procedure involves both social negation and symbolic incorporation, but the ritual serves to introduce the de-socialized, depersonalized, individual to society as a nonbeing, “the incorporation of a person defined as socially dead” (38, 52). Patterson describes the main features of the ceremonies or events which marked the negation/incorporation of in slave past societies once slaves were acquired:

The ritual of enslavement incorporated one or more of four basic features: first, the symbolic rejection by the slave of his past and his former kinsmen; second, a change of name; third, the imposition of some visible mark of servitude; and last, the assumption of a new status in the household or economic organization of the master.<sup>139</sup>

Mustafa’s conversion to Estebanico—his social death is conceived firstly, through his selling himself into slavery in Azemmur. After being transported to Seville by Portuguese traders, the ritual baptism he receives is another source of paradox. Baptism is a symbolic rebirth in the Catholic tradition, but within Mustafa’s narrative, it becomes a symbolic death. The Baptism Ceremony, the Commercial log, is a death

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<sup>139</sup> (Patterson 52)

ceremony. Mustafa regenerates his selfhood by telling the story of his birth. A narrative reversal of the social death ritual of slavery also fills the traces of erasure of Cabeza de Vaca's account. Birth and Death are inverted in Mustafa's account and re-assigned meanings within his narrative, which further deepens the gap of dissonance between his perspective and the Eurocentric, imperial matrix, which narrates his absence/presence as Esteban.

Names became misnomers. The incomprehension and illegibility prevail, and sounds are miscomprehended, disregarded altogether, or even misinterpreted against an alternative system and source. As Tvetzan Todorov has discussed in his work, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, sometimes misinformation would come about from a preset form of assumptions or truths which shaped the perception of reality. Todorov uses the hermeneutic behavior of Columbus and his role as an "interpreter" of the signs of reality as a primary example of this prejudice of perception as he also dissects the true epistemic modes which drive attention and values of Columbus against the reality before him (3-33).

Todorov describes the naming process Columbus partakes in for each body of land which meets his gaze. His names assigned all pertain to Christianity. It is one thing to assign a foreign land with names from a foreign faith and a religious worldview. It is a different type of epistemic violence when the territory of an actual place is renamed for a mythic place within a fantastical fiction—naming a real place after a fictional one cuts the distance between the real and fantastic.

Lalami explores the nature of the process of change through the leitmotifs of naming and storytelling, as well as alternating time frames within the narrative structure. While Aronofsky begins with the letters of the Bible, Lalami's narrator-protagonist begins with a beginning of multiple beginnings, and he begins the text in the same manner in which each chapter of the Qur'an begins and the same manner in which every Muslim begins any action: he begins in the name of God.

The first symbolic death Mustafa experiences is his transformation into a commodity in exchange for capital when he sells himself into the slave trade. Mustafa decides to be a merchant but compromises on his values when he enters the slave trade. Mustafa takes a step towards redemption when the famine in Azemmur causes his family to struggle and starve, and so Mustafa makes one last sale as a free man to give his family a chance to earn and survive. Mustafa haggles himself into slavery, selling himself for fifteen *reis* to two Portuguese merchants who offered ten (Lalami82).

Readers see Mustafa's first *conversion* and *erasure* as he disappears as a person and becomes circulated as a possession. Still, Lalami undercuts his entrance into slavery with an act of agency because he *chooses* to enter slavery to try and help his family survive. Additionally, Mustafa's profession as a merchant gives him an additional aspect that competes with the figure of Cabeza de Vaca, who joined the expedition of Narváez as *tesorero*, treasurer, for the voyage.

The second *conversion* is his Baptism. As a slave, his body is treated as physical property to receive the imposed name of his new identity, but he is also made to receive a new faith. When Mustafa recalls the mass conversion in Seville after he entered into

slavery, he describes it as a writing activity which marks his body like a sign without meaning through text, and every symbol of birth is inverted to death; the symbol of joining a family of faith is inverted to becoming an orphan, and the act of creation which writes Estebanico into existence as a Christian is inverted into an act of erasure which detaches Mustafa from his own conception of self:

...the priest closed his book and laid it carefully on a table beside him. He nodded to the merchant, who nudged the first in our group forward, a woman with wide, protruding eyes. The priest's fingers traced a cross in the air, over her face and chest. I looked at him unblinkingly, all the while wondering what the action meant and why he repeated it with each one of us. It was not until much later that I understood the significance of the sign on our bodies. I had entered the church as the servant of God, Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-Zamori; I had left it as Esteban. Just Esteban—converted and orphaned in one gesture.<sup>140</sup>

Possession is a linguistic performance in Lalami's novel. In this passage, words empty of meaning for the body receiving them impose a new type of emptiness, a new type of absence. The tension between Mustafa's conception of himself and the Church's ritual performed upon him is present in the inverted symbolism Mustafa's perception creates of the ceremony. Mustafa conveys the strangeness and incomprehension of the external ritual he is witnessing upon himself. Tracing a cross in the air over the face and chest is the symbolic ceremony described by Patterson, which transforms Mustafa as a slave into a servant of God within the Catholic tradition. This ceremony also entails renaming him as Estebanico. This ceremony is the intrusive mode of social death where the newly named Esteban exists as an outsider incorporated within the imperial matrix as a nonbeing.

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<sup>140</sup>(Lalami 108-109)

Mustafa already conceives himself as a servant of God in his identity as a Muslim. This conversion is a ritual created to give him a place in the Christian body of believers, but, from Mustafa's perspective, this name is erased. With it, every other aspect of his identity contained therein is erased as well. The act of the sign replacement of the Arabic name, replaced by a Castilian name strips Mustafa of not just his name, but his culture, history, family and his home. Mustafa, son of Muhammad, grandson of Abdussalam, a native of Azemmur, is emptied of his own past and transformed into the foreign sign of Esteban, later to be known and even further reduced as Estebanico when Dorantes buys him (Lalami 149).

These rituals of erasures create silence, submission, and social negation. In the reading of the *Requerimiento*, Mustafa divides our attention between the scribe and the absence before him-the village which should be occupied by a collection of voices, children, and a community that has left only the traces of their former presence. In the Baptism ceremony of the Seville Church Mustafa, it is an event that chronologically precedes the ceremony of the *Requerimiento*, but Mustafa's writing circles back to it so that we as readers experience it much later following the *Requerimiento*.

Both the *Requerimiento* and the Baptism evoke a sense of alienation in Mustafa. Lalami portrays Mustafa's internal subjectivity of each event and, in so doing, the text illustrates the paradoxical and inverse dynamic of colonial discourse: Mustafa's body is made legible to the colonial authority, but illegible to himself. The strangeness of the *Requerimiento* is one derived of this same cause- prevailing illegibility. Patricia Seed

alludes to the absurdity of the ritual, as described by Bartolomé de las Casas<sup>141</sup>. Both the baptism and the *Requerimiento* are a form of individual and communal erasure, epistemic violence.

The act of transformation which serves to undo the *sign* and *gesture* of this moment of *erasure* is embodied in the text itself, because Mustafa's future self, the self that writes this account and addresses the reader directly in the Preface and throughout the novel is the writer who has recuperated his name and everything carried within it. But in the moment of the conversion, Mustafa and the unnamed woman before him are silent bodies in a spectacle of possession, converted for imperial legibility and control. Estebanico becomes a voiceless, silent shadow within the larger body of a subordinated, dark, unnamed mass. Only later, after he survives the expedition, at the moment he sits down to write his account, he has a fully developed double vision of himself as he is perceived by the gaze of his master and his master's company. The scene of the *Requerimiento* is the first transformation of a different type of body—a body of land abandoned by the people when the expedition first arrives.

As already discussed, language serves as a key form of *possessing*, but it also offers agency and epistemic freedom to remedy the erasures of epistemic violence. Mustafa's birth story is the second chapter of the novel, and the ending Lalami writes for Mustafa to write for himself as a *twist* in the historical plot of Estebanico's historical end, further illustrating the complicated relationship between how a story is created and spread for different ends and by different means. No longer wishing to be a servant to men and a

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<sup>141</sup> (Seed 71)



servant to empire, this is how Mustafa ends the story of his return, not with a physical return to Azemmur, rather with a return to the new home in the new land with a wife and a soon-to-be-born child. He ends the story of Estebanico so that he may continue the story of Mustafa:

Nothing else, I thought, would put a stop to Father Marco's advance. I wanted the friar to go back to Coronado with the news that, not only had he found no gold in the northern territories, but the fierce Indians of Hawikuh had repelled his mission and killed Estebanico in the process. The servants of empire would forget about the Seven Cities of Gold. The people of Hawikuh would be safe. Estebanico would be laid to rest. But Mustafa would remain, free to live a life of his choosing.<sup>142</sup>

The Story of Hawikuh is Mustafa's last story, and unlike the rest of his narrative, it is a complete fiction as he narrates the death of Esteban for "the servants of empire." This phrase is an echo of Mustafa's reclaiming his Muslim identity as a "servant of God." This language of servitude also subverts his status as a subaltern in the imperial narrative. Mustafa has personally witnessed and experienced the destruction born out stories, myths, and the desire of Narváez for the alleged riches of the Kingdom of Apalache.

This destructive cycle of mythical desires imposed on the "New World" comes full circle but the second time around, Mustafa exploits the mythical images of the Viceroy Mendoza and Fray Marcos when he uses the myth of the seven cities of Cibola to return to the undiscovered, uncharted lands where he and Oyomasot can be free.

In the eighth century, the legend tells of the story of the flight of a Portuguese bishop and six other bishops to an island called Antillia, with a number of Christians whom the Moors had oppressed and driven out of the Iberian Peninsula. Each bishop established and ruled a city. The very names of the fabled seven cities evoked fabulous riches in gold, silver and fantastic comfort. Although

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<sup>142</sup>(Lalami 322)

these cities were located between the Azores and the Caribbean islands, their names regained currency in Mexico City.<sup>143</sup>

Lalami shows a character that exploits the erasures and violence of the geographical mythologies imposed on the indigenous lands and peoples of America. The portrayal of storytelling in the film is the main source of problematization of the locus of *enunciation* represented in the Eurocentric gaze accepted as official history. By showing how Mustafa existed freely outside of the historical narrative couched in Cabeza de Vaca's narrative, Lalami's fiction serves the major purpose of historiographic metafiction, showing that "knowing the past becomes a question of representing...of constructing, and interpreting, not of objective recording" (Hutcheon 70).

### **Maps and Compasses**

The *Requerimiento* in Mustafa's account greatly differs from the account of Cabeza de Vaca. In the text of Cabeza de Vaca, the right of the Spanish crown to possess the territories he and his company had survived never enters into question. In Cabeza de Vaca's text, the status of Estebanico is maintained as inferior, subaltern, as he is treated as property even when used as an interpreter and guide, muchlike the *indios tomados* (Indians taken). Estebanico's role and agency are always in the service of or subsidiary to the actions of Cabeza de Vaca and the others he is meant to serve. In Chapter 33 of his

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<sup>143</sup>Ilahiane, Hsain. "Estevan De Dorantes, the Moor or the Slave? The Other Moroccan Explorer of New Spain." *The Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2000, pp. 1–14, doi:10.1080/13629380008718401. Print. P 4.

account, where Cabeza de Vaca addresses Estebanico simply as “el negro,” the actions of Estebanico show a latent agency, but the perspective and action Cabeza de Vaca creates stems from his point of view within the imperial enterprise. The mirroring effect repeats as Cabeza de Vaca is more concerned with how his fellow Spaniards perceive him after finally finding and meeting “*rastros de Cristianos*” (traces of Christians):

...in the morning I took the Negro and eleven Indians with me and, following the trail, went in search of the Christians. On that day we made ten leagues, passing three places where they had slept. The next morning I came upon four Christians on horseback who, seeing me in such strange attire and in the company of Indians, were greatly startled. They stared at me for quite a while, speechless. Their surprise was so great that they could not find words to ask me anything. I spoke first and told them to lead me to their captain, and together we went to Diego de Alcazar, their commander.

After I had addressed him, he said that he himself was in a plight, since for many days he had been unable to capture Indians, did not know where to go, and that starvation was beginning to place them in dire straits. I stated to him that, in the rear of me, at a distance of ten leagues, were Dorantes and Castillo, with many people who had guided us through the country. He at once dispatched three horsemen, with fifty of his Indians, and the Negro went with them as a guide, while I remained and asked them to give me a certified statement of the date—year, month, and day—I had met them, as well as the condition in which I had come. They complied with this request.<sup>144</sup>

Unlike Mustafa, Cabeza de Vaca’s account does not question the right to possess, rule, and control. Both Mustafa and Cabeza de Vaca are not only rival storytellers, but they both have occupations concerned with the ownership and transfer of human property. By giving Mustafa the profession of a merchant before his last deal, his selling himself into slavery, Lalami creates a figure which competes with Cabeza de Vaca in more than one respect. Lalamirecenters the narrative on Mustafa. In the context of Cabeza de Vaca, it seems he does Estebanico an enormous honor just by the mere fact of

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<sup>144</sup>(Trans. ByBandelier, Cabeza de Vaca, XXXIII)

naming him, because, in contrast, the Indians and tribes named within the text always exist as tribes, as collectives, never as individuals. In contrast, Lalami creates individual voices for various differing Amerindian individuals as well, including Mustafa's wife, Oyomasot.

At this point, Cabeza de Vaca and Estebanico have witnessed the same hardships as they have both lived surrounded by the constant threat of scarcity, disease, and death. While they are separated and reunited multiple times, the survivors of the expedition all experience the condition of servitude. Despite so many shared experiences, the traces we see of Estebanico as he appears in Cabeza de Vaca's text show us he does not occupy the same space as the others. His is a marginalized figure, and he is grouped with the other human beings made into marginalized and objectified figures, the Indians Cabeza de Vaca takes with him on his journey, much like objects or tools Cabeza de Vaca is simply carrying with him in order to aid him on the way. The active verb in this passage is *tomar*, literally "to take" and figuratively "to conquer," which is the verb Cabeza de Vaca repeatedly uses to refer to the *taking of slaves* as well as the *taking* of indigenous interpreters and guides by the expedition along the way. What is the experience of the person being *taken*? That is the perspective Mustafa offers, the point of view Lalami gives readers, which Cabeza de Vaca cannot.

Cabeza de Vaca echoes the language of possession in describing his conversation with Captain Diego Alcaraz, who is described as having been lost due to his inability *to take* any Indians as guides and interpreters. Estebanico, in the text of Cabeza de Vaca, goes where he is bidden without showing opposition or resistance to a figure like Cabeza

de Vaca and Cabeza de Vaca, in the passage, does not need to give the Captain a map to help him find his way to Castillo and Dorantes because he simply transfers Estebanico as the guiding object, the compass and map personified. Lalami's fiction exploits this reduction to imagine what sort of capacities Mustafa would have had to learn and master to traverse the territories and to effectively serve as a guide as he does to the Captain in this narrative of Cabeza de Vaca. But Mustafa's text does not just transform Estebanico; rather, he also transforms men like Cabeza de Vaca as he also interprets the desires and the needs of the men who *take* and *possess* the land and the people.

The Spaniards need the *service* provided by the subaltern figures that surround them as their knowledge and ability are shown as lacking. Despite the contrasting knowledge and agency revealed in the figure of Estebanico as well as the figures of the Indians, these actions and this knowledge are confined to the fringes within Cabeza de Vaca's story. At the end of the passage, the necessity of Cabeza de Vaca to have his story, his testimony, and the time and place of his presence, written down and documented, is the priority. The main object that occupies Cabeza de Vaca's attention is the way he is perceived (changed in form after his journey) by the gaze and the writing of his fellow Spaniards. Cabeza de Vaca's account is about himself and his *services* to his king as he states in his own Preface; Estebanico's abilities among the land and the people encountered are necessarily shown merely as serving Cabeza de Vaca's ends.

Estebanico is explicitly portrayed as an intermediary figure, a metaphorical bridge between Cabeza de Vaca with his company and the other figures of alterity, the indigenous tribes they encounter. Having just escaped the servitude of one tribe, Cabeza

de Vaca is unsure as to whether they should read the strangers as threats or as potential allies so Estebanico goes ahead of the group to communicate with them:

As we proceeded that day, in great fear lest the Indians follow us, we spied smoke, and, going toward it, reached a place after sundown, where we found an Indian who, when he saw us coming, did not want to come toward us and ran away. We sent the Negro after him, and since the Indian saw him approaching alone he waited. The Negro told him that we were going in search of the people who had made the smoke. He answered that their dwellings were nearby and that he would guide us, and we followed. He hurried ahead to let them know of our coming. At sunset we came in sight of the lodges, and two crossbow shots before reaching them we met four Indians waiting for us, who received us well.<sup>145</sup>

When Estebanico does not appear as an intermediary or secondary figure, he is completely reduced and marginalized to the background of the action. Despite the reduction in his representation, it is clear Estebanico was more than an intermediary player. Linda Hutcheon cites that the past can only be known through textual traces, and historiographical metafiction uses fiction to problematize the history of representation and to contest the epistemic authority which makes figures like Estebanico absent and silenced in a shared history (63-69).<sup>146</sup> Estebanico's marginalization in Cabeza de Vaca's account necessitates an "epistemological questioning of the nature of historical knowledge," and Lalami uses these traces of history to create a narrative to challenge the authority of a colonial epistemic framework through the story of Mustafa (Hutcheon 68-69).

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<sup>145</sup>(Trans. By Bandelier, Cabeza de Vaca, chapter XX)

## Storytelling and the Seeds of the Imagination

Mustafa's mother reminds him: "Nothing new has ever happened to a son of Adam" because "everything has already been lived and everything has already been told," but one must listen to the stories (Lalami 54). Mustafa's narrative is circular, as he refers to events, he has not narrated yet while the stories move across time and space because his narrating self is separate from his experiencing self. After telling the story of the arrival to Florida, the story of his birth, and the story of the first episodes of violence he witnesses against the bodies of indigenous captives in the march to Apalache, he tells the Story of Azemmur. This chapter provides an intimate portrait of Mustafa's family life with his sister Zainab and his twin baby brothers, Yahya and Yusuf. Lalami's protagonist is first and foremost, the storyteller, the narrator, who prefaces his account with full consciousness of his readers and his self-representation. From his father, who was a scribe and his mother, who was a storyteller, Mustafa inherits an appreciation for both written and oral culture as he writes his story after having lived it and having used his oral talents as an interpreter to survive.

Survival, through storytelling, reiterates the figure of Scheherazade in the story of Mustafa, as Mustafa uses language as a form of revival for the social death of his slavery and baptism. To write against the *erasures* of conquest, Lalami uses the narrative as the essential tool common to both historiography and fiction. Language and narrative counteract and re-contextualize the vision of a distinctively Iberian brand of *Orientalism*. Edward Said summarizes how narrative destabilizes the essentialist, orientalist vision:

Narrative asserts the power of men to be born, develop, and die, the tendency of institutions and actualities to change, the likelihood that modernity and contemporaneity will finally overtake “classical” civilizations; above all, it asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, and not an objective condition of history. Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision.<sup>147</sup>

Narrative and vision clash and collaborate to different ends, and different mediums can work in sync or opposition. In Mustafa’s case, it is his self-written narrative which allows the gap to be revealed between the perfunctory vision painted upon his body within the gaze of his imperial master and the imperial institution against his life narrative. After the preface, the novel starts with the event which ushers Mustafa (Estebanico) into the colonial narrative of history as the first chapter starts with the arrival of the expedition to Florida. Immediately after the arrival of Mustafa into the stage of *history*, Lalami reimagines the beginning of Estebanico by having Mustafa write the beginning of his story, as the second chapter is Mustafa recounting the story of his birth, as it was told to him by his mother. Mustafa’s individualized narrative provides the opposing point of view to the unitary web of vision of imperial discourse, but it does not destroy that discourse altogether; it simply reminds readers that there can be multiple beginnings, multiple narratives, and multiple endings. This multiplicity in the *beginnings* of Mustafa and Estebanico is one way the novel deconstructs time in the narrative—both history and fiction.

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<sup>147</sup>(Said 240)



Lalami plants the idea for how much harm and benefit can result as an effect of the way stories are created, circulated, and received. The stories, like the goods circulated in the *sook* (open-air marketplace), also represent a form of social capital, a resource Mustafa pulls from in his survival during the expedition. After being a merchant, then a slave, Mustafa learns how to become a healer:

If I was confronted with an illness I did not recognize, I listened to the sick man or woman and offered consolation in the guise of a long story. After all, what the sufferers needed most of all was an assurance that someone understood their pain and that, if not a full cure, at least some respite from it lay further ahead. This, too, was something I had learned in the markets of Azemmur: a good story can heal.<sup>148</sup>

Words can be violent, but words can heal wounds as well. In the novel, the reader sees how Mustafa re-fashions himself out of the *erasures* of the imperial enterprise, from slavery and the nature of epistemic violence. This re-imagination is a form of healing. Words can heal. This has a double interplay with the healing work we see performed in Cabeza de Vaca's text.

In the preface, Mustafa names himself as the rival storyteller of Cabeza de Vaca, and he makes clear the multiple pitfalls involved in "remembering" what we witness. Lalami gives us a narrator in Mustafa who actually appears more reliable than Cabeza de Vaca because Mustafa is much more open and explicit about his limitations, especially in terms of memory. In addition to himself and Cabeza de Vaca, Mustafa's narrative names two additional storytellers famous within the Arabic and Persian literary/oral traditions:

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<sup>148</sup>(Lalami 231)

Scheherazade, the famous storyteller who used stories to survive each night with a Sultan who would execute his wives after the wedding night, and Antara ibn Shadad, a warrior poet whose verses were famously ornamented around the Kaaba in Mecca as part of the image echoes the way poetic language elevated an entire community.<sup>149</sup> Antara, a figure which was even written about by the Orientalist Bernard Lewis, was a writer-protagonist and warrior-poet of pre-Islamic Arabian poetry. He was a black Arab who was denied the status of nobility normally inherited by a son from his father because of the fact that his mother was a slave, but Antara was able to use his poetry as a transformative form of social capital to dramatically elevate his status, his position in the community by rising up in the ranks through his verse, to the level of the canon of the *Mu'allaqat*.

This reference to Antara plays on the value systems and identity politics of race and culture from an alternative framework of that of the chivalric tales which informed the imaginations and the fancies of the conquistadors. We realize that Antara is not just a projection the mother has of the father, but the figure of this warrior poet, this alternative figure of *armas y letras*, letters and arms, but rather Antara is also another resource within Mustafa's imagination for him to emulate, value and learn from with regards to the transformative potential of language on a person's conception of self and their position in the community. Antara was able to transform his own alterity through the power of language, which provided him with a path for social mobility.

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<sup>149</sup> Clouston, W.A. *Arabian Poetry for English Readers*. Evinity Publishing, 2009. Kindle Edition of Text. Lewis, Bernard. "The Crows of the Arabs." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1985, pp. 88–97. [www.jstor.org/stable/1343463](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343463). Web.

The name of Scheherazade as another name in circulation within the imagination of Mustafa's parents and within Mustafa's story is much more familiar through the multiple translations of the stories of the Arabian Nights. However, here the reference reminds us of the profound consequences of stories as a means to survive, to escape death itself, both literally and figuratively speaking. Scheherazade uses her stories to escape a literal death. Like Antara, she elevated her status through the art of storytelling. Her stories caused the king to spare her life, and eventually make her his queen. Mustafa uses his stories as stores of information for saving himself and others from literal death and disease. Mustafa also uses his stories to save himself from a figurative death of his own identity and self-conception. And as Mustafa mentions at the beginning, his account is meant to serve as a means to remember him by, to save himself from being forgotten. Lalami's story provides the figure of Estebanico as a form of the afterlife within the imagination.

Besides the images of Antara and Scheherazade, this interaction mentioned about the parents of Mustafa at their first meeting is a beautiful parallel which reduces the grand scale cliché of encounters between civilizations to reduce the lens to one of the most intimate encounters where difference and desire both come into play. Part of the craft of formulating a separate vision to diverge from the absences imposed on the multitudes in the text of Cabeza de Vaca is the novel's detail in bringing life and light, not just a name, to the individual stories which interconnect within Mustafa's story of survival during the expedition, which serves as the frame tale like Scheherazade's in *The Arabian Nights*. The example of Mustafa's parents shows how preconceived notions

shape the perception and imagination of individuals based on the texts which supply those notions.

The poems of Antara have shaped the perception, imagination, expectations, and desires of Heniya, Mustafa's mother. The figure of Scheherazade and the web of tales she weaved to entrance the king has shaped the perception, imagination, expectations, and desires of Muhammad, Mustafa's father. The large looming motif of names and stories conjoin in the names of the chapters. Every chapter within the novel is given a different title, but it is always introduced as the same framework, that of a story. After the Preface, Mustafa starts with The Story of La Florida, and the chapter that immediately follows is the story of his birth. This transition from the chronicle of conquest following the arrival of the expedition into the story of one individual's personal life history represents the larger parallels the narrative draws between the individual bodies and the collective bodies and lands of the conquered. In the second chapter relating the story of Mustafa's birth, where Lalami's narrative travels far into a fictionalized past to have Mustafa recount the story of his birth while his mother, Heniya, and his father, Muhammad:

When my father met Heniya's father, each saw in the other something he desired. [...] After my father recovered from the shock of discovering that my mother was not Scheherazade, he tried to make the most of it. He finished his studies and, between bouts of cold, fever, or fatigue, he looked for work. That was when he noticed that Granadans were everywhere. Not only did they have credentials and experience, but they also had an exotic appeal my father could not match. With the fall of Melilla to the Crown of Castile, he decided to move back to Azemmur with my mother, now pregnant with me. This caused great consternation among his in-laws, who, incidentally, were also recovering from the shock of discovering that my father was not Antara on his steed.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup>(Lalami 27)

And what is contained within a name? As Lalami points out in the voice of Mustafa, a name speaks volumes, possesses a history and tradition and in this case, the two singular names dropped into Mustafa's account of his parents also charges the act of storytelling which Mustafa and Lalami are both engaged in with additionally significant meanings and implications. This story is a storage of information because even as it provides us with an intertextual meta-discourse on stories, it parallels and juxtaposes an amorous meeting with a violent one because both desire and imagination play into the expectations and visions of the men of the Pánfilo de Narváez expedition, rooted in the same tendency of the imagination as shown in Mustafa's story of the meeting of his parents. This characterization foment the readers' appreciation for how cultural filters are formed among individuals to perceive reality distinctly.

We read these personal details, but they are set upon larger themes of human nature and history as Lalami repeats and complicates multiple historical images of migrations, crossings, and conversions. We see historical migrations as the backdrop of the perspectives of a family affected by the political and economic realities taking shape across the Mediterranean as Mustafa remembers his mother describing his father's difficulties in finding work as a notary in Fez because "the city was overrun with refugees from Andalusia, Muslims and Jews, who had fled the forced conversions" and who were skilled professionals ready for hire for their livelihood (Lalami 25). Our present concerns of earning a livelihood, preserving a religious identity, immigration, and the supply and demand for labor, link us to these characters painted in a distant past. By

marking this context as the figurative birth of Mustafa's perspective into his distant past, this is where Lalami's novel takes multiple pasts and places them in conversation with the oft-repeating nature of human history.

*The Moor's Account* evokes the image of the storytellers and also shows the multiple possibilities and functions stories serve in real life. Firstly, stories help us survive. When Mustafa is trekking with his comrades through the wilderness, stories serve as means to store the information he has gathered over time and then recall that information, and it also serves as an immaterial way to preserve his spirit in times of desperation. Secondly, stories help us learn. Mustafa can remember and learn healing processes through stories. Lastly, stories serve as a means to symbolically return to our home and past across an expansive distance.

But stories can also be dangerous and lead storytellers and their listeners to cloud the truth of certain realities. Both narratives become meta-narratives as they reflect on the nature of storytelling and the aspects of creation, audience, omission, and even the false representation of reality. This meta-commentary on storytelling goes beyond the mere evocation of classic legends like that of Scheherazade.

Firstly, the nature of storytelling is linked to the art of healing. Secondly, the nature of storytelling is discussed as a competitive creative venture. The theme of storytelling also lends itself to the idea of immaterial exchanges. *The Moor's Account* is a direct challenge to go beyond the account of Cabeza de Vaca. Cabeza de Vaca is the official counter, the treasurer of the expedition.

Mariah Wade illustrates how Cabeza de Vaca journeys through a series of negotiations—negotiating difference and sameness between the many indigenous groups and himself.<sup>151</sup> Wade cites the many examples of gendered labor roles Cabeza de Vaca is forced to take on. The article zooms in on the moment Cabeza de Vaca and his companions are truly helpless, desperate and completely at the mercy of the aid of the Amerindians who find them in a horrific state on the Island of *Mal Hado*, or the Island of Ill Fate. This specific naming gesture serves to garner our sympathy for Cabeza de Vaca and his comrades as the victims of fate. The articles also affirm the transmutability of the designated categories of Self and Other within one singular person, as Cabeza de Vaca is transformed into the strange and terrible Other within the perspective of specific groups who encounter his strange appearance, language, and manners.

Dennis Herrick has written an extensively researched profile of Esteban. Herrick's background in journalism helps him to generate and map every trace of Esteban to provide a comprehensive understanding of the life and times of Esteban from the historical coordinates which contextualized Esteban's mysterious persona while also understanding the unreliability of the stories and myths which were projected upon a man about whom so little is known.<sup>152</sup> In the contemporary imagination, the figure of Estebanico becomes a palimpsest for projecting the biases and agendas of the present onto this mutable figure of the past.

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<sup>151</sup> Wade, Mariah. "Go-between: The Roles of Native American Women and Alvar Núñez Cabeza De Vaca in Southern Texas in the 16th Century." *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 112, no. 445, 1999, pp. 332–342. JSTOR. [www.jstor.org/stable/541366](http://www.jstor.org/stable/541366). Web.

<sup>152</sup> Herrick, Dennis. *Esteban: The African Slave who Explored America*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018. Print.

Lalami emphasizes how Estebanico disappears in the shadow of Dorantes within the colonial discourse. Mustafa lives through models from his indigenous cultural framework. Like Antara Ibn Shadad, Mustafa defends himself and tells his own story and elevates his status through language. Like Scheherazade, his skills with stories and skill with languages serve as his means of survival. Before he was a slave, Mustafa was a merchant skilled in accounting and exchanges who would easily recognize a bad deal. If we see the exchange of the encounter, it is consistently painted as a *mal trato*, an abuse, or exploitative exchange. The last sale Mustafa ever makes is selling himself into slavery. Why would such a skilled merchant participate in such a *mal trato*? Mustafa connects the decision to the consequences of conquest, and when his family becomes destitute, he sells himself as a sacrifice to save his family from starvation.

In telling this history, my companions began to modify its more damaging details. They credited Narvaez with all the poor decisions, they omitted the torture and rapes they had witnessed, they justified the thefts of food and supplies, they left out the Indian wives they married, and they magnified their suffering at the hands of the Indians as much as their relief at being found. In this shortened and sanitized form, the chronicle of the Narvaez expedition became suitable for the royal court, the cardinals and inquisitors, the governors and officials, and the families and friends they had left behind in Castile.

But no one asked me to testify. I should have been resentful of this, but I am not—not yet. The only thing at once more precious and more fragile than a true story is a free life.<sup>153</sup>

The source of contemporary erasures is the result of people as communities and individuals denied the platform to tell their own stories. Lalami's novel shows us the importance of being able to tell one's story. We *need* rival storytellers. But Estebanico is acknowledged in his instrumentality as a guide, a translator, and a shaman as well. The

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<sup>153</sup>(Lalami 286)



one role he is truly never granted is that of the narrator. It would be truly amazing if one persevering historian, braving shelves and boxes of dusty archives, did find any written trace of Estebanico beyond what is currently known, but the fact of the *Joint Report* in and of itself represents this narrative absence. Even though the text is lost to us now, we know that only three of the four survivors testified. Estebanico was very noticeably excluded (perhaps because he was already on his other expedition, or perhaps he was dead already. True, it might have seemed normal to his time, but that does not make it any less significant of a gesture for our purposes. Mustafa uses memory and storytelling to move through space and time. His intent is a return as well, but he never finds a way to return physically to Azemmur. However, he finds a new home on his journey. Lalami's fiction shows how language can be both a source of both erasure and liberation.

The removal and addition of names fit into the larger notion of language and its constructions (stories) to hide and reveal, to omit and to include, to impose a distinct vision upon a distinct reality-whether that reality belongs to an individual or an entire community. In the first chapter of the novel, Mustafa tells the readers about what kind of stories he has heard of the Indians. These stories create a mythology-a storehouse of expectations which pre-condition Mustafa's imagination and curiosity before he ever sets foot in *The Land of the Indians*:

I was also curious about this land because I had heard, or overheard, from my master and his friends, so many stories about the Indians. The Indians, they said, had red skin and no eyelids; they were heathens who made human sacrifices and worshipped evil-looking gods; they drank mysterious concoctions that gave them visions; they walked about in their natural state, even the women--a claim I had found so hard to believe that I had become captivated. This land had become for me not just a destination, but a place of complete fantasy, a place that could have existed only in the imagination of itinerant storytellers in the souqs of Barbary.

This was how the journey across the Ocean of Fog and Darkness worked on you, even if you had never wanted to undertake. The ambition of the others tainted you, slowly and irrevocably.<sup>154</sup>

Knowledge and memory are contained and preserved through Mustafa's stories, which he inherits from Azemur and then expands in his experience with individuals he meets later on. And finally, stories are used as a means of transport, a virtual time machine to re-orient the consciousness, memory, and being of Mustafa within time and space. After the harsh experiences, the four survivors have gone through, their own appearances begin to take on monstrous proportions. The leap from man to monster seems minuscule through the power and deception of appearances and stories.

We continued along the trail all of the next days, eating nothing but blueberries and meadow grass. Our beards had already grown long and bushy, but now, with our teeth stained blue and our stomachs bulging with undigested grass, we began to look like figures from some ancient story, told by generation after generation to warn young children about the dangers that lurked far away from home.<sup>155</sup>

This moment takes the dynamic we already find in the account by Cabeza de Vaca one step further into the fantastical. When Cabeza de Vaca looks so changed that he is not even recognizable by his fellow Spaniards after the time he has spent living among the indigenous communities of Florida, Texas, and Mexico. Lalami's novel recasts the themes of naming, possession, and erasure through repetition with variation. By chapter 13, the pomp and circumstance of ritualized possession through the recitation of the *Requerimiento* and the founding of a city is no longer part of their protocol. As the men

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<sup>154</sup>(Lalami 6)

<sup>155</sup>(Lalami 187)

travel, the novel creates more space for dissonance from the dominant ideology of imperialistic erasures.

The goal is uncovering more than one *locus of enunciation*. Lalami's historiographic metafiction emphasizes the existence of multiple centers and multiple perspectives of time and knowledge. Ashour and Lalami explicitly depict the interaction of multiple *loci of enunciation* and the power dynamic of coloniality inscribed by one framework of knowledge upon another. As Ashour and Lalami point to a different epistemic framework with the incorporation of the Qur'an and the daily practices of Muslims, they use fiction to provide a different way of thinking and perceiving shared reality, and shared time and space which becomes influenced by coloniality.

### **A Land Not So Strange: Perception of Nonhuman Environment and Speech**

Nature forms another element to the alternative epistemic framework and experience within Mustafa's narrative. Mustafa's reflection on his experiences incorporates what he observes, hears, and remembers in the nonhuman beings and elements of the environment. Not only does Mustafa read the silent gestures and expressions of his master Dorantes, but he also reads the sounds of nature. Lalami trains her reader to pay attention to this aspect of Mustafa's perception from the very beginning.

Mustafa describes how he was born while his mother, Heniya, and father, Muhammad, were traveling from Fes to Azemmur in a ferry. In their journey, they see Portuguese soldiers transporting a Muslim woman prisoner. The Portuguese soldiers

refuse to wait their turn in the line of travelers, for the ferry to take the current passengers and return for them. Muhammad, Mustafa's father, is a skilled negotiator and calmly tries to diffuse their impatience when he speaks to them haltingly in Portuguese. When the soldiers insist that they have priority over the civilians, Mustafa's father uncharacteristically questions their authority and confronts them, which questions as to why they feel they deserve special treatment. He then questions why they have a young woman in chains. Mustafa's father stands up to the belligerent Portuguese soldier, but that soldier escalates the confrontation to physical violence. He strikes Mustafa's father in the shoulder for questioning his authority, and Muhammad begins to bleed out.

Mustafa recounts the episode with detail that incorporates the sounds of the call for the evening prayer, the wind, the donkeys, and the horses as well as the people. Mustafa, as a storyteller, is writing down the story his mother orally related to him many times over. He learned to pay attention to the sounds of both the human and the nonhuman from his mother and from stories like these because, as we see in the passage below, the spiritual framework his mother teaches him places value in these aural signs of nature. Nature is not chaos, which *coloniality* must transform into order.

One of the travelers, perhaps remembering the saying of our Messenger, as recorded by Abu Hurairah—when you hear a cock crow, ask for God's blessing, for their sound indicates they have seen an angel, and when you hear a donkey bray, seek refuge in God for their sound indicates they have seen Satan—picked up a heavy stone and threw it at the soldiers. Others soon joined him, though it was dark by then and no one could see anything. The wind moaned, the horses heaved, the donkeys brayed, people shrieked.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>156</sup>(Lalami 29)

Animals communicate in their language, and nature is not silent within the cultural framework where Mustafa was born. Mustafa is repeating the story which his mother had told him, and the representation of nature is a significant aspect of the cultural heritage Mustafa's mother, Heniya, transmitted to her son through a story. According to the framework of the story and the cultural interpretation of the nonhuman speech and sounds, animals perceive elements of reality hidden to human beings. Mustafa's perspective stems from an epistemic framework where nonhuman beings speak as part of the intelligible soundscape. The source of the traveler's interpretation of his environment is the tradition of *Hadeeth* or sayings of the Prophet Muhammed (S) and the chain of translation that follows through one narrator of *Hadeeth*.

This dramatic event before Mustafa's birth is an example of how a cultural framework shapes the travelers' perception of reality and their mindset towards the correct course of action. Why are stones thrown at the soldiers?<sup>157</sup> Throwing stones is an action Muslims perform during a ritual of the Hajj Pilgrimage. Pilgrims throw stones at a pillar, which symbolizes Satan to reenact an action of the prophet Abraham according to an Islamic narrative. Firstly, Lalami is replacing one ritual with another. As has already been mentioned, Mustafa's perspective of European domination over non-European bodies is a vision of a ritual of erasure, just like the scene of the *Requerimiento*.

When the travelers throw the stones, they are interpreting the Portuguese soldiers according to their rituals and systems of knowledge. This episode also portrays the colonized reading the colonizer as a diabolical presence rather than a divine one. This

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<sup>157</sup>Stones are thrown in Ashour's trilogy as well (Granara 50). This evokes an image of David and Goliath; it also evokes images of Palestinians under occupation.

action by the travelers turns the God myth reinforced in *The Fountain* upside down. As Restall explains, Moctezuma did not conceive of Cortés as the return of the Mexica deity, Quetzalcoatl (96). In Lalami's novel, the soldiers and their abusive behavior meet indigenous resistance, and the novel deflects the mythology of Amerindians perceiving Europeans as Gods reincarnated. Just like the narrative of Ashour, the experience of conquest is unnatural—a dehumanizing and humiliating prospect openly and clandestinely resisted.

When Mustafa is recounting the journey of the surviving men through Florida, Texas, and Mexico, the progression of the narrative shows how the nonhuman environment becomes less mysterious, less threatening—less of a form of Other—within the perception of the travelers. At the beginning of Chapter 13, the figures of the men are doubled by their shadows. Their shadows represent metaphorical projections of how their experiences have opened them up to a different perception of and interaction with the natural environment. The shadows meld harmoniously into *shapelessness* within the natural environment. This land is no longer as strange as it once was. As Mustafa explicitly states, the unknown surroundings have now become familiar. They see the organization in animals and plants; they recognize a different system. Nature is not just malice and chaos within this new perception, nor is it empty of its presence and its harmonious elegance. Even after suffering the storms and scarcity of resources, they can see and hear the multi-dimensional characteristics of the living system which surrounds them and accompanies them.

Across the sky, groups of geese flew north in formation. We walked in twos and threes, with our shadows in front of us made soft and shapeless by the passing

clouds. The oak trees all around us were heavy with spring leaves. Bees hummed among the wildflowers. The wilderness that had once seemed so alien to us had grown familiar and the calls of animals in the distance no longer alarmed us.<sup>158</sup>

The first line even echoes a parallel to show how, just like the geese, the men also move through space in a united formation. Nature serves as a model or inspiration, and we see a loose form of biomimicry in the mirrored formations of flying geese and marching men. The vision of their shadows “made soft and shapeless,” projected upon the earth communicates almost a visually symbolic form of union with the land and the sky which were at first so foreign, and so “alien” to them (Lalami 185). The soundscape which he and his companions experience and then grow more familiar with stands out after Lalami teaches readers to pay attention to these details within other frameworks knowledge and perception of nature in the story of Mustafa’s birth.

Nature is Other, but the Otherness of nature starts to fall away. Growing more familiar with the environment includes the lessening of the threat or danger induced by the natural environment which surrounds them. The sounds of nature play a major role in understanding the transition the characters undergo with their environment. The sounds (and silence) no longer stir fear among the men. They transform from strange to familiar. This sonic familiarization directly contrasts the dynamics of other conquest/nature narratives. In a comparative interlude of her analysis of Darren Aronofsky’s *The Fountain*, Jadranka Skorin-Kapov draws an association between the Mayan jungle in Aronofsky’s film and the sonic presentation of the jungle in Werner Herzog’s *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972).

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<sup>158</sup>(Lalami 185)

In Herzog's film, the tension between subjectivity and objectivity—between Aguirre's obsession and madness, and the indifference of the jungle—is presented mostly aurally: the men floating on a raft experience the silence of the jungle as a merciless threat, creating anxiety regarding the unknown. As already mentioned, unlike fear directed at something or someone objectively present, anxiety is not connected with an objective presence; it is a sense of a possible future doom. There is no place for symmetry since there is no visible order, neither man-made nor natural. The visual impression is of an immense chaos: on the one side there is humanity trapped in its obsession for gold (as a symbol for whatever happiness it might bring), moving along on the confined space of a raft; and on the other side, there is invisible natives guarding their habitat. The men on the raft destroy the possibility of salvation offered by the two arriving natives after killing them for the silly reason of blasphemy.

In *Aguirre, Wrath of God*, the jungle plays the role of a character as the mysterious, distanced, omnipotent entity beyond the comprehension of the men on the raft. In *The Fountain*, the equivalent character role is played by the Mayan culture expressed through its myth of creation, and visualized by the pyramid as the place of worship and the ceremony of the sacrifice.<sup>159</sup>

Skorin-Kapov highlights the anxiety created by the aural threat of the silence which surrounds the men on the raft. Much like Radwa Ashour's use of sound in the occupation discussed in Chapter 2—silence represents a doom unknown yet certain to come. It is especially noteworthy that Skorin-Kapov describes the film's "invisible natives" as part of that threat of the jungle in Herzog's film (60). In *The Fountain*, Aronofsky recreates both aspects of the merciless threat Skorin-Kapov describes - the mysterious jungle and the invisible native. In *The Fountain*, both the jungle and the warriors form a silent presence and remain in shadow. It is only the shaman figure who speaks with subtitles, but even his words are presented as cryptic and mysteriously connected to a mystical secret that only the *conquistador* can understand and unlock.

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<sup>159</sup>(Skorin-Kapov 60-61)



## The Space In Between

Edward Said's reading of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* discusses the double standard in terms of the amount of proximity and identification a reader is allowed to aspire to when it comes to the figure of the Colonized Other. As Said shows, the ability to unite with the non-White, non-Western, and non-Christian is impossible, and the distance between Self and Other is conceived as permanent and impermeable. This abyss is mirrored in the characters of Fielding and Aziz in Forster's novel when they are poised to reconcile, but alas cannot overcome the "gulf between East and West" (Said 244). The gulf, the uncrossable abyss, is fiction. Lalami shows, through Mustafa's eyes, how perception is relative and knowable, east and west is a matter of orientation and perspective.

The idea of the unknowable gap, the impossible distance does not necessarily collapse within Mustafa's perspective. It is not enough to invert the equation between Civilized Self and Monstrous Other because this would only reinforce the binary characterization of characters like Aziz and Fielding in *A Passage to India*. Lalami creates an inner life for Estebanico in the form of Mustafa, as Forster describes for us in his *Aspects*, but through Mustafa, Lalami also shifts the epistemic framework and locates the narrative in a frame which goes above the limitations of east and west.

Mustafa "the rhythm of Qur'anic verses, [reminding the believers] that to God belong the east and the west" and "whichever way you turn, there is the face of God" (Lalami 318). The world is one, but there are so many ways to see it. Lalami shows us the

intimate worldview of a unique Muslim, and within the realm of fiction, we can understand Mustafa according to his terms. Cabeza de Vaca and Estebanico both had to navigate the same dire consequences though their respective stations and circumstances, of course, account for major differences. By calling attention to Estebanico's unknown perspective, Lalami's novel also aids us in revisiting what we do know of Cabeza de Vaca's experience.

### **How Mustafa sees the other Others**

In the square, one of the soldiers was trying on a feather headdress from the temple and asking a friend to help him secure it around his head. Then, like an actor in a play, he walked down an imaginary road, his arms on his hips in an effeminate pose, while his comrades laughed and jeered. Across the way, a group of settlers were playing a game of baraja, excitedly calling out the points they scored. Patience, I thought, patience.<sup>160</sup>

They had only met one leader when they engaged in battle at the initial crossing of the first river. Yet, instead of presenting this episode as true mimesis, the novel presents it as a mockery and ignorance. Better said, it represents a constraint in their imagination and perception because, within five pages, Lalami follows these theatrics with another spectacle. But this mockery is the marker within a chapter showing the faulted foundations of knowledge the Castilians carry with them concerning the lands and peoples they now encounter.

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<sup>160</sup>(Lalami 68)

Mustafa observes a large gap between reality and the elegant illusion the document's recital creates. The sensory details of Mustafa's account are an important tool to communicate the dissonance between colonial narrative and reality. Complete silence is interrupted by music. The members of the expedition hear the arrival of the Indians before they see it, but their perception is already limited by what Edward Said pointedly described as a constraint in thought when he was describing the *Orientalist* perception of the Other (Said 43, 44).

He falls in love with Oyomasot, and when he marries her, his whole sense of time and being changes as he is "no longer alone and bereft" (Lalami 234). Mustafa marries Oyomasot as a free man because, at this point in his journey, he is no longer a slave to Dorantes or any Indian nation under the present situation to which he has risen. His desperate circumstances led to social mobility.

...my keenest desire had been to go back to my old life in Azemmur, where I could start my days with my mother's blessings and end them by contemplating the rustling river from the solid safety of our rooftop. Instead, I had been pushed further and further into a fate from which no escape or reprieve seemed possible. And so there came a moment when I stopped struggling, when I decided that I would cease making any more plans to return to the old days. I made up my mind to look upon the present as exactly what it was: it was all I had. To add to my sense that my curse had turned into a blessing, not only was I free—I was no longer alone.<sup>161</sup>

His marriage and social mobility are two aspects through which the figure of Mustafa creates a critical mirror towards the narrative of Cabeza de Vaca. When Mustafa speaks of his wedding night with Oyomasot, he explicitly and deliberately omits the

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<sup>161</sup>(Lalami 234)

details of the beginning of his physical relationship with Oyomasot but as he “wanted to record it” happening “because it marked the beginning of a new time in my life, a time when I was no longer alone and bereft.” <sup>162</sup>

Mustafa *transforms* through the names and the stories he carries and performs multiple identities, thus inhabiting a border space of being, an ontological multiplicity. This border space develops into the dominant space of his narrative as the dichotomies of the roles of slave/master, civilized/barbarous and the stages of center/periphery, are disrupted and revealed to be more fluid (and in some cases more fallacious under being constructed and capriciously circulated). These transformations form the basis of this character’s mobility into the multiple roles he performs, and the most notable effect of the transformations is the collective result of him being able to de-stabilize pre-written roles for himself and Others and instead, write not one but multiple roles for his Self.

Lalami does create a presence out of the absence, out of the historical traces, of Estebanico in Cabeza de Vaca’s text, but Mustafa’s consciousness does not just skip over the line drawn rather he is constantly reading against the absences written for him- his acknowledgment of the accounts of the other survivors, his reading of his master Dorantes, his former master in Seville, his realization of how the tribes come to see him as a healer, his memory of how the church converts him- he is constantly reading and writing against a series of erasures which confine him in language, performed for him in ritual, and communicated to him in the words, actions and expressions of others, especially how others name him. Lalami’s text shows Mustafa constantly removing the

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<sup>162</sup>(Lalami 234)

veil/s of alterity and airing them out for us to behold, which is key to illuminate not just the fact that Estebanico did have a story, even if it was lost and impossible for our recovery and preservation given the historical circumstances, but rather the turn to see through the multiplicity of signs exchanged upon Mustafa's body they essential manner by which Lalami shows the same mechanism which speaks to the present, the process of dehumanization in the epistemic violence of language and its consequences.

In the same way that Mustafa and the Indians are perceived as objects or tools utilized for the mobility and survival of Cabeza de Vaca, we recall the image of the Mayan priest and the Mayan warriors are literary devices within the manuscript of Izzi. Spain's imperial Other in the sixteenth century manuscript of Cabeza de Vaca, and the twenty-first century manuscript of Izzi, is accessory—a catalyst for the White subject to see himself transformed. He sees his alterity reflected in the gaze of another:

...one of the Indian guides asked me what the white men were saying to one another. When I replied in his language, the Castilian soldiers regarded me with the same look of wonder I had seen on their countrymen's faces years earlier, whenever they encountered the strange creatures of the new world. Nothing in their gaze suggested that I was a man like them rather than some exotic beast or other. It was only decorum that prevented them from reaching out to touch me, to see if I was real.<sup>163</sup>

At this moment, Mustafa sees himself through the colonial gaze. He is a body and voice illegible and irreconcilable to the eyes which behold him. In their gaze, he is more beast than man. Mustafa constantly reads the colonial gaze. He sees his role as Esteban reflected within that gaze. As Esteban, he exists as a subaltern. Mustafa uses language to operate and run against these orientations of nonbeing imposed upon him. The gaze

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<sup>163</sup> (Lalami 251)

further aligns him with nature and the multiple tribes he encounters. Rather than accept the vision his master possesses, Mustafa becomes the one who is transformed and transforms as well, by being able to *learn* alternative knowledge systems and rather than committing erasures against his being and the being of others, when he encounters the healer, he takes on an apprenticeship and learns from him.

Chaubekwan taught me that, just as unfounded gossip can turn into sanctioned history if it falls in the hands of the right storyteller, an untested cure could become effective if the right shaman administered it.<sup>164</sup>

Dorantes no longer follows the founding protocol of conquest, which readers see in the scene with the reading of the *Requerimiento*. Dorantes changes through the successive roles he is also forced to fill within their struggle to survive, making the nature of constructed roles even more apparent as the survivors are tested within new cultural frameworks of the tribes they visit, trade with, and are traded between (as slaves). In the trajectory of the novel, the status of Dorantes is greatly reduced because though he is Estebanico's owner when he arrives, he also possesses social mobility though it is not always upward mobility as he is made a slave to the tribes they encounter. It is only when the survivors are returned to the colonial fortresses and settlements of *Nueva Españab* because of the cultural framework which shifts as soon as the crossover once again out of the Land of the Yguaces and into the land possessed/known/articulated by the empire.

Mustafa gains social mobility among the Amerindian tribes, and it contrasts with his previous subaltern status. The four survivors have to survive without the colonial

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<sup>164</sup>(214 Lalami)

matrix that guided their previous protocol. Though he is enslaved by the same tribes, as an interpreter and then as a healer, he gains new status and mobility. Mustafa fulfills the conditions of Greenblatt's self-fashioned author/character but also proves to be an exception. And the perceived authorities and aliens, as Greenblatt calls them, multiply and surround Mustafa, but he navigates, in language to move constantly among and in between the individuals and institutions who represent the alien and the authority (9).

Lalami gives Estebanico his own story as Mustafa traces each pass of his transformations through remembering his life as a Muslim before he became Christian, his life as a merchant before he became a slave, and he describes his family life in Azemmur before the Portuguese conquered the city. Lalami crafts Mustafa's consciousness to highlight the specific images and rhetoric he witnesses in the conquests of multiple nations, and these rites of possession he witnesses parallel his transformation in name and body, which also represents sites of conquest.

Lalami's narrative unravels the vision of the Other originally dissected for us by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, and while Said addressed the imperial vision, narrative and policy of English and French orientalism, Lalami's novel is one key example of a contemporary reading (and rewriting) of the history of Spain's imperial Others. As Barbara Fuchs points out in her study on power and representation, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European identities*, 1492 was not at all the end of the Peninsular struggle with Islam, but rather the struggle was continually transformed, transferred and reiterated as the empire across both stages, the transatlantic and the Mediterranean. Imperial discourse creates sameness from within, and sameness from

without to draw the line of difference between imperial Self and Other. Constructed categories were inherited and utilized in different forms when the discourse extends outward from the Mediterranean stage to the Atlantic. The mechanisms of representation stem from this pull of homogeneity, of lines drawn to enclose imperial identity.

The narrative of Lalami attacks the very same lines which were drawn and reiterated on the coast of Florida and Azemmur alike to reveal the pores, the slippages to illuminate the manipulative nature of the borders between history and fiction, Self and Other, and the ones who make them. The ways we speak to, about, and of people in our present and the images we use to represent them and convey their identity can also be forms of epistemological violence when we pre-ordain them with scripts, gestures, and words that are not of their own making.

On the other hand, when we realize and articulate the limits of our epistemological framework, we can reach outside them and then convey the greater multitude of perspectives and thus benefit from them as well. Lalami's novel helps us see this border, this limit on historiography by crossing over into fiction and by showing what and who can be imagined, limited or expanded on the other side of the lens we use to see and learn difference and alterity.

The "lens" through which individuals like Cabeza De Vaca and Cortés saw "new" peoples and lands was drawn from their "old" experiences whether it was a *usable past* they would act upon in the *political program* of conquest, similar to Mustafa, or whether they derived their perception from a known text or mythical imagination that gave shape to their desires and expectations, similar to Mustafa's parents when they



imagined Scheherazade and Antara in place of Heniya and Muhammad. Within the characters of Mustafa's parents, whom Lalami has Mustafa introduce us to early on within the novel, we see a potential for Walter D. Mignolo's *spluritopic hermeneutics*, because as the two beings who gave life to and raised Mustafa, his parents represent the intermingled and overlapping nature of written culture and oral culture.

Mustafa also possesses an intense desire for gold and riches when the expedition finds a piece of gold among the fishnets upon their arrival in Florida. Mustafa himself buys and sells into the slave trade before entering slavery himself. The fiction that enters in the historical portraits makes these historical actors into complicated, multi-faceted beings due to the added complexity by which individual and communal identities cannot align with binary categories.

Lalami expands readers' perspective of the literal and figurative border spaces he navigates through language and memory—through stories. The text of Lalami in itself becomes border space as readers are constantly crossing between time and space, between multiple pasts, as each chapter is always named as a “story” of a person, event or place and the very last chapter is “The story of the return” (Lalami 305). The novel maps out this silent/invisible spatiality in the voice of Mustafa through his own words. He witnesses the disease of conquest driven by overspun stories mostly formed from desire and fantasy, and he also remembers the lesson his mother taught him, a cure can come in the form of a story.

## Seeing Beyond Stories

Except for his name and supporting function as *lengua* (interpreter), Estebanico occupies the shadow in the *Relación* of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Lalami writes him back into the main story from outside the *borders* and creates a new possibility for remembering who he *might have been* within the space between history and fiction. The historical Estebanico and the fictional Mustafa both traverse the space between languages and peoples across continents and, most importantly, the voice of Mustafa as a writer, witness, and interpreter deconstruct the subaltern status of Estebanico in the text of Cabeza de Vaca. In contemporary historiography, there has been a trend to seek out the subaltern agency, and though historians can never truly enter within the *mentalité* of such historical figures, they can use primary resources to approach, to approximate and to reasonably speculate on the human conditions that interact with historical facts and events. Figures like Estebanico leave few traces to portray their voice and perspective.

It is a tendency toward the desire to understand how people of the past would *read* and *react* to the circumstances around them that drive an impossible mission within the limits of documentation. But fiction opens a new window to conceive and remember figures like Estebanico/Mustafa. The end of Estebanico represents the liberation of Mustafa. Mustafa begins the novel by rewriting himself into history. By recounting his perspective on his journey and his losses, and erasures suffered, he can recuperate his own story.

Lalami displaces beginning and end, at once written and rewritten by Mustafa, and thus resists placing Mustafa on the linear temporal framework, within the same orientation, which had limited and silenced him, and placed him in the shadows. Lalami's novel moves the reader to remember a historical past, but an ever-present absence constantly shades the memory. This interplay of memory and invention, fiction and historiography, embodies the inherent, contrapuntal process of the novel-Lalami is building a presence from an absence, remembering an image forgotten, and giving voice to a space embodied by silence.

While Lalami's novel constantly draws out the *erasures* in language, time, and space as a source of violence against individual and communal identity, community, and knowledge, Aronofsky's film appropriates the *erasures* of colonial semiotics in the silent logic of the collective imagery presented. In this analysis, with Mignolo and Said's readings at hand, Lalami's use of colonial and medieval imagery and discourses creates a *presence* to resist, recuperate and rewrite the absence brought about by the violence of erasure while Aronofsky's film creates another form of absence. The writing act and the act of storytelling in Lalami's novel serve to create a meta-discourse.

Fiction creates a new space of subversion and modification to re-inhabit the imagination and the narratives of "East" and "West" with recast and remembered voices of the *subaltern*. Writing becomes a political act in of itself, by showing us what *might have been* in the past, fiction creates opportunities for *what may be* in the present and future. Lalami presents us with a historical fiction that cuts across the autobiography, slave narrative, chronicle, and travelogue to recuperate a form of subaltern agency in the

site of imagination within fiction against the violence of erasures. Unlike Darren Aronofsky's film, the act of storytelling is not a means by which histories disappear under one dominant narrative.

Lalami presents us with rival storytellers. Mustafa first recuperates his name and then recuperates his story in the act of this retrospective account, *The Moor's Account*, and names his "rival storyteller" in the figure of Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Lalami creates this intertextuality to interrupt the chronicle of conquest from the beginning to the end. The fictional Mustafa's account competes with the historical document of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación*, also called *Naufragios*. Lalami's historical fiction gives a new meaning to *armas y letras* (weapons and letters) as it deploys language to counteract violence committed in history and writing.

Mustafa sees and writes with a double vision the images, silences, and absences imposed on his own body and upon the body of others to then *read and write against* those projections through his narrative, his own body of knowledge, and his perspective. External, historical space re-envisioned against the internal, subjective space in Mustafa's self-narrated consciousness. He uses storytelling (in the combined nature of writing and oral traditions) as a means of reconstitution against the erasures transplanted upon his body to relocate himself within his *locus of enunciation* –creating a competing and coexisting epistemic system and temporality. The naming and renaming gestures serve to form a link to the epistemic violence witnessed and resisted within Mustafa's account as well. Ultimately, he uses his stories as a means of return to Azemmur through the mediation of language and memory despite the distance of time and space.

Every aspect of Cabeza's ending description of Estebanico constructs an identity which lay outside the empire's accepted body of being, the notion of Self. Estebanico's faith is left out of the final description because, like many slaves, he has been baptized and given a Christian name. The multi-dimensional characterization of Mustafa in Lalami's novel directly contrasts with the nature of Estebanico's presentation in Cabeza de Vaca's account. Mustafa is a voice born out of fiction but based in history. This shift in perspective gives Lalami the space to create further alternative frameworks for the narratives of conquest and use the inherited myths of conquest, which have now become so popularized within the contemporary imagination of American audiences and readers to create multiple ruptures and displacements through the name, time and narrative.

Lalami's novel uses the theme of naming, temporality and a meta-discussion of storytelling and narrative form to lay the foundation of reframing the locus of enunciation (Mustafa's voice, culture, history) to move freely within and without the power construct of Iberian Imperial discourse which is the premise upon which Cabeza de Vaca's account operates. Mustafa maneuvers himself through the gaze of the colonizer, which forms an external framework and his internal framework. The gaze of the colonizer is the same system of knowledge of the Other described first by Edward Said in the context of English and French colonial expansion and then by Fatimah Tobing Rony in the context of nineteenth-century imperial exhibitions. It is a system that confines Mustafa and the various Amerindians (including his wife Oyomasot) into an aggregated mold- a form legible to the Iberian imperial gaze and epistemic system of extraction and control.

Lalami uses the craft of fiction to remember to and to repossess the past and speak to the present. Lalami and Mustafa both cut the spatial, metaphorical distance, between history and fiction, across time and space and in so doing, they provide a new body (in the body of fiction) to the bodies subjected to the epistemic violence of erasure (bodies of the individual, bodies of land and especially, bodies of knowledge providing the foundational worldviews, histories, and identities of communities marginalized and removed to the past, the shadow, the silences, and absences imposed upon them).

## Conclusion

The summer I visited Granada, I walked through the museum of a Moorish bathhouse. I was taking photos when I overheard a grandmother say to her grandson *qué pena que se destruyan las cosas*, what a shame it is when people destroy things. Ashour and Lalami have written stories which delve deeper into understanding the nature of defeat, and the resilience of those who try and survive it. The destruction and violence in these fictions is not just physical violence. There is violence in language and imagination.

The current political climate in the United States, and on the international stage as well, is still a volatile space for people who are deemed different and dangerous, as if they were less than human. These fictions speak to our reality because we need to change the conversation. These novels offer an opportunity rarely available in reality, as they allow us to change our perspective. To look through the eyes of a Muslim like Mustafa and understand that Muslims like him, in the past and in the present, are not less than human is a necessary intervention that fiction provides within today's reality. In Radwa Ashour's trilogy, Granada after its fall in 1492 is the historical background to an intimate story of a Muslim family living in Spain at the time in history when Muslims were being forced to either give up their religion or leave the country. These novels return to the past to provide lessons for our present. These fictions evoke the violence of the past, and yet they also speak to Muslims facing the prejudice of Islamophobia in the present day.

Both are anti-war sagas which demonstrate the grotesque horror underlying the narrative glorification of conquest, possession, oppression, and violence through the subjective portrayal and reimagination of the experience of those under the heels of that spectacle. History is a doom upon the colonized subject which repeats itself in Ashour's trilogy and in Lalami's novel. Granada's fall reminds Saad of the siege of Malaga. The flag at Florida reminds Mustafa of the siege of Azemmur. Saleema sees beyond the spectacle of grandeur in the procession of Columbus as the figures enslaved march by in chains. Their postures are seen again in the death of Saleema, and in the punishments of Moriscos as they are witnessed by Maryama and Ali. The spectacle of conquest becomes a specter of dread which haunts multiple generations. They look on with the other spectators but their gaze does not pause upon the surface. They do not see a species different from themselves—like the Holy Kaaba in Maryama's story—they perceive their shared nature and solidarity with the specimens captured for the display.

While Ashour and Lalami create resistant readings of defeat, their fictions help problematize the mythology which has been popularized in the modern imagination. Aronofsky's film derives its epic imagery out of the mythical imagery of conquest. The story evokes pathos, but the unique placement in time and space becomes problematic when the visual narrative manifests a manipulation and glorification of images which have dark associations to colonial violence and domination in the conquests of Al-Andalus and Latin America. The audience is not meant to question the romantic reimagining of conquest while the film reinforces Orientalist tropes and the binary imaginary of East and West for the popular imagination of contemporary U.S. audiences.



In Chapter 1, I highlighted the *Orientalist*, imperial imagery, which frames the images of the film and its plot fantasy. This is not a discussion of fact versus fiction; rather, I have discussed how the storytelling and imagery conform to the *Orientalist* vision of non-White, conquered nations, and communities. The historical narrative has been refashioned, but the images themselves reveal embedded repetitive patterns of epistemic violence (as it has historically been apparent in the imperial ideology of the transatlantic enterprise of Iberian nation formation and colonization) which should be problematized, contextualized and then answered with another narrative, as I have shown in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Aronofsky's multiple imaginations of time and space connect the motif of dark and light to illustrate Tommy's journey of spiritual enlightenment. The experience of dominated cultures subjugated to an imperial enterprise must be taken into account. In *The Fountain*, the Mayan and Moorish warriors are struck down in the path of the *conquistador*. They lack agency and are removed from the center of the narrative through a sense of remoteness and a constructed distance; they essentially disappear within the grand narrative of the film. Within the film, the subaltern does not speak—the visual language which communicates the transcendence of Dr. Tom and Izzi's quests build upon absence and emptiness—an Edenic imagination which necessarily empties a space to justify its occupation and possession. This absence or erasure appears *natural* and even *beautiful*, but this epic, idyllic beauty overshadows a history of violent *erasures*.

While Aronofsky maintains spaces of conquest with a sense of emptiness to play out Izzi's and Tom's spiritual re-orientation, Ashour uses a fictional narrative to

remember the voices and stories of the people that *might have* filled those blank spaces. Ashour redraws the traces and places, bodies, and spaces and focuses on the experience and connections rooted in those spaces to create a compelling counter-narrative to the tropes we see in Aronofsky's film. The Bible prefaces the conquistador's perspective, but the horde of Mayan warriors will appear as an untranslated, unarticulated mass of natives to be chapped down like brush in the *conquistador's* path. While the words from the Book of Genesis supply our cognitive associations in viewing the film, the perspective of the pensive warrior entering into the dangers of the unknown of the dark, threatening path leading through enemy territory, is the point of view adopted through the camera's lens as well, hence the gaze of the spectator sees through the eyes and into the eyes of Captain Tomas, Tommy, and Tom.

Birth and death as bookends of life form the connective imagery within the film, which ambiguously connects and repeats every image of birth, death, creation, and rebirth to mirror the cyclical aspects of nature and humanity. The seasons leave and return. Babies are born, and after we age, we die, but these events which repeat in everyone's existence never cease to trigger a sense of awe.

The act of becoming *orphaned* and *uprooted* from one's family, identity, and cultural heritage is a repeated image in the trilogy of Ashour as well. Unlike Laila Lalami's novel, *The Moor's Account*, Radwa Ashour portrays the occupation of Granada. Can the subaltern speak? In historiography based on written accounts and records, the subaltern cannot speak, but in the imagination of fiction, we see two results: the subaltern speaks, and we remember how the subaltern is made silent in the first place. Ashour

undermines the imperial vision and criminalization of the Muslim, Arab Other, by providing intimacy with the perspective of the family of Abu Jaafar. Ashour's prioritizes the combined internal strength and weakness of her characters' inner space above their historical setting because the novel shows the subjective experience of history.<sup>165</sup>

Laila Lalami's recapitulation of the history of Estebanico manifests the potential of fiction to elucidate further our understanding of colonial history with Mignolo's *pluritopical hermeneutics* serving as a key concept describe how Lalami shows alternative epistemic frameworks overlapping over bodies of people, land, and knowledge. The story deconstructs the naturalized narrative of the single perspective offered by the sixteenth-century Castilian *locus of enunciation*. Lalami creates a rival storyteller who retrospectively recounts the same events but through a new perspective. Mustafa, the protagonist narrator, places himself in direct competition to the author of the relation, which serves as the main testimonial for the Narváez expedition even up to today: Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Cabeza de Vaca creates a narrative that is unique in itself among the travel narratives of Spanish colonial expeditions, but his text makes the figure of Estebanico virtually invisible. Both Ashour and Lalami emphasize the power and agency to be found within the written word as they address the violence of the suppression and *erasures* of epistemic traditions.

Ashour and Lalami approach the dynamic of this power from different aspects. Ashour shows a family who works to preserve the written word. Saleema smuggles and hides Arabic and Aljamiado texts within the two properties the family owns so that they

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<sup>165</sup> (Comendador 307) Ashour repeats this trend among characters when they question and doubt God.

may be saved from the Inquisition. Mustafa uses the written word, to tell the truth of his life and also create the fiction of his death. Both Saleema and Mustafa's families are families who respect the power and knowledge within the written word. The culture of writing figures in both genealogies and becomes an inherited trait passed down between the generations.

By centering on this major theme of the power of the written word, both authors break up the binary model of Self and Other by incorporating the voices of reason which sought to speak to colonial power from within the system of knowledge and power. There were important figures that sought to compromise and reconcile, and Ashour brings an important voice within the struggle when Ali tells his grandmother Maryama about the work of don Francisco Núñez Muley.

Mustafa's character presents an example of the complicated path individuals might have, and many very well must have taken to reconcile the circumstances of a conquest. His story does not boil down to picking a side between two polar extremes. Lalami builds upon the space of being and choosing, which creates a path navigating the in-between. Mustafa makes the choices we see him make to survive and to preserve what he may of his life and his hope for the future. Mustafa's skill with language plays a major part in helping him survive the spaces he physically and metaphorically navigates.

Mustafa is re-constructed as the center of this narrative by Lalami, out of the absences which characterize the known traces of the historical figure of Estebanico, the black Arab slave who was one of only four survivors of the entire expedition although his testimonial was never requested. Mustafa's transformation from free man, to slave, to an

interpreter, to a healer and finally to a storyteller, is mediated through language. As subaltern, Estebanico has no voice and no space for social mobility. Language becomes the space of social mobility in Mustafa's story.

Lalami marks the absence created by epistemic violence-the same epistemic violence described in Mignolo's *Darker Side*. Mustafa speaks from the *darker side*, as Mignolo has coined it, and Lalami points us to contemplate, to imagine what a voice as unique as Mustafa's (Estebanico's) *might* have testified had he been given the opportunity. Mustafa's story emanates from a different *locus of enunciation*. Since Estebanico did not have a known reception, the fiction of Mustafa has found a new *locus of reception* in the United States of 2014 and on.

It is a world of the post-: post-Jim Crow, postcolonial, post-9/11, but it is a reality that still communicates with the past recalled within Lalami's fiction. Lalami's novel shows us a historical past, but the imagination of her narrative speaks to the present. In a post 9/11 world, Muslims need to be imagined with some truth of what rich and diverse inner lives they lead. Fiction possesses the potential to challenge and problematize the representation of Muslims in media sources, which position them as silent stock figures of violence, ignorance, primitivism, and of course, terrorism.<sup>166</sup> Now, more than ever, fiction is needed as a reminder and for many a revelation into the side of human nature which "politeness" prevents one from revealing, the "romanceful or romantic side" is "one of the chief functions of the novel" (Forster 46). Though it may conjure cheesy clichés, it is important to see a Muslim falling in love, or bonding with his brother, or

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<sup>166</sup>Alsultany, Evelyn. *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*. New York University Press, 2012. Print.

even going to a brothel—being an imperfect human being rather than a purely virtuous or an entirely villainous trope.

Erasures and transformations of identity manifest in the representations of symbolic birth and death through language. The images of birth and death become inextricably linked to writing. This link is also apparent in Aronofsky's film and Ashour's trilogy. In Aronofsky's film, Izzi rewrites her death as an act of creation and rebirth. In Ashour's trilogy, Saleema's life and death are linked to the written word as she inherits a love for books from her grandfather. Saleema conceives of her own life and existence as words on a page. Both Izzi and Mustafa represent figures of writer-protagonists; however, Izzi, as Queen Isabel of Spain interpreting sacred spaces of Mayan temples according to Biblical imagery, is a dark reminder of European, Christian worldview imposed upon non-Christian bodies. Mustafa's transformation from free man, to a slave, to the interpreter, to the healer and finally to the storyteller, is mediated through language, which becomes a repossession of his identity.

I believe my future work will require a deeper analysis of the subaltern female slave. Ashour and Lalami have written parallel characters with compelling connections and differences in Fedda and Ramatullai. Both women are black, Arab slaves who are separated from their children, and unable to read or write in Arabic; they seek help from the protagonists in Lalami and Ashour's novels. Fedda is a black Arab slave who is a friend of Maryama. In the second novel of the trilogy, the reader learns the story of Fedda as she has told it to Maryama. Her great grandfather was ten years old when he was enslaved and sold to a prince to serve at the Alhambra. Her grandfather had such a

beautiful voice and countenance that the Nasrid royalty took him with them when they entered exile after the fall of Granada (Comendador 341-342). The women of her family became the booty of the defeat, and even though her master is kinder in comparison to others according to Fedda's description, Fedda's husband abandoned her and their son, Federico, not wanting to live the life of a slave. Fedda's son ends up fleeing Granada as well.

After Maryama dies, Fedda is an essential companion to Ali, who visits him when he is in prison. Ali reads a letter written in Arabic, which is supposed to inform Fedda of the whereabouts of her son, Federico, after he is one of the young men forced to leave Granada, and he flees the city before they can officially remove him. Ali reads of Federico's death, but hides the truth from Fedda and *translates* a fictional story of Federico's survival (Comendador 451). He uses fiction to save Fedda from the truth. He falls in love with her and asks her to marry him, but she gives him no answer, and Ali is forced to leave it that way when José Benamar sends the Inquisition after him on accusations of heresy.

Ramatullai is a female slave in Seville who works as a cook and maid in the same house as Mustafa. Her story is significant in Lalami's novel, but I could not do justice in this project. In one of the most tragic scenes of the novel, Mustafa thinks robbers have entered the house. However, when he enters to try and stop the crime he thinks is being committed, he witnesses her rape by their master, Bernardo Rodriguez. As Mustafa describes it, "every slave knew this could happen, but no slave believed it would until it did" (Lalami 141). The story of Ramatullai is an essential story within the frame narrative

of Mustafa. He fosters an unrequited love for her, and over the three years serving in the same house, they form a deep friendship, and he tries to help her gather information and find her daughter, Amna, who was sold to a different master. Mustafa devises a plan to help Ramatullai by writing a letter in Arabic from Ramatullai to Amna.

Mustafa uses Arabic as a kind of secret language, which he knows their own master will not be able to translate as he himself writes the letter Ramatullai dictates to him on her behalf. Though neither Ramatullai nor Amna can read or write Arabic, if Amna receives the secret letter, she could find another slave to translate and essentially decode the letter with her mother's location. Mustafa never gets to help execute the plan and is abruptly separated from Ramatullai when he is sold to Dorantes. These parallel narratives of Ali and Mustafa falling in love and then being separated from Fedda and Ramatullai, both women with fragmented family histories, involves a nuanced parallel in the presentation of the female subaltern in Spain's historic sixteenth-century empire (the time period both women inhabit) and the gendered knowledge of Arabic letters.

Fedda and Ramatullai are critical examples of the depiction of gendered labor. Kasem's article highlights how Saleema and Saad invert the gendered assignment of written knowledge and storytelling. Gendered intellectual labors of storytelling and writing are inversed in characters like Saleema and Saad. When they are married, Saad spends every night telling Saleema stories of his home and family in Malaga, reiterating the trope of Scheherazade. Saleema embodies written knowledge. Izzi Creo's character in *The Fountain* is also a notable example as she dominates both written and oral knowledge in the film. Izzi's use of language and imagination as a Pygmalion effect because though



the film depicts Izzi in multiple imagined forms, Izzimolds the real and the fictional versions of Tommy into her desired form with the knowledge and mentality she wants him to possess. She ultimately accomplishes it through oral and written language. The representation (or invisibility) of creative, intellectual agency in women in these histories of the past, as it is seen in characters like Maryama, Izzi, and Saleema, is a story that deserves a more in-depth understanding.

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